

Is it tough
being
"a friend"?

友人 キャラは 大変 ですか?

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DATE

伊達康
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GAGAGA

Is it Tough Being a Friend?

vol.1

by Yasushi Date

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Is it tough
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Prologue

“huff...Jeez.”

A boy breathed heavily while looking below at the corpse of a subjugated monster.

There was an empty parking lot not too far off from the shopping center. Dusk began to slowly approach, this was the period of time commonly referred to as “the time of disasters”.

Today as well, the boy had pummeled the enemy here.

He had protected the town from the peculiarity which was about to bring “death and destruction” to this world.

—When I had rushed over, the battle was already over.

So, I don’t know how he beat the enemy. Maybe he released a wave of spirit energy from his hands, summoned a legendary sword, or shot beams out of his eyes...my curiosity was unending, but I didn’t need to know.

The reason being that this is not a “territory” that I should step into.

That’s because ordinary people, who don’t have any power, shouldn’t recklessly get themselves involved.

(Nevertheless...it was quite helpful that the enemy suddenly found itself in a parking lot and that they fought there, wasn’t it? Only three cars were toppled.)

As I was worrying about such things, the peculiar corpse steadily continued to disappear.

When I had taken a glimpse of it from the streets, it was a monster of three or four meters, but now its body was about the level of a pickling weight.

I wonder why these monsters want to disappear or explode in their final moments. Perhaps it’s a way to remove their own traces? Well, from a human’s perspective, it helps out since it saves the trouble of having to deal with the dead body.

(Now then, I have to do my job as well)

I soon confirmed that the peculiarity had completely vanished, jumped out from the shade of a utility pole, and ran to the boy.

I called out to the boy's back in a voice that seemed as if I only came here just now.

"H, hey Ryuga! So you were here!"

"Ah. Ichirou."

Ryuga, the boy, turned around at once and instantly made an expression that said "not good!"

Don't worry. I know nothing, I saw nothing. I wouldn't think that there was a peculiarity there, not even in my wildest dreams. I won't even pay attention to the faintly rotten odor.

Now that my partner there said something, I'll talk on and on as much as possible, as if I'm distressed.

"It suddenly went out of sight so let's hurry. Make a break for it! That monster from earlier might still be around here!"

Although I'm saying this to the very person who defeated it, I have no choice.

That's because I'm not supposed to see the hidden side of that guy. That's my established role.

"Watch out Ryuga! That car's been flipped like a pancake! That's definitely from that monster! It's dangerous being here!"

"It's alright, Ichirou. It seems like the monster's gone."

I was being frantic on escaping, but the boy lightly shrugs his shoulders.

Well, speaking honestly, I paid special attention to the peculiarity and waited until it vanished.

"It's gone? What are you trying to say?"

"Well...I'm not too sure myself, but the monster died there a while ago. It seems that it fought with someone and somehow got defeated."

And it was you that defeated it.

The monster's dead body barely retained its form when I saw it. However, I'm certain that it's the one that appeared on the streets.

"A, are you sure?"

"Yeah."

"What the heck, who could go against that monster...?"

"Don't know, but it's definitely alright now."

While saying so, the boy made a smile.

Surprisingly, women's clothing would match him, as he has androgynous, well-ordered features. He has silky straight hair, slightly tan healthy skin, along with long and well-proportioned legs. In addition, the back of his hair is tied up.

For a second year high schooler, he's a little petite and thin, and his blazer is a bit big on him. However, beneath the clothing, he has some lean muscles like a feline animal or a sculpture, and is considered quite lucky to have them.

Yup. As expected, this guy is a blooming flower—someone who's truly a protagonist.

"Now, let's head home, Ichirou."

"Um, sure."

I immediately followed after the boy who started walking. Normally, there wouldn't be anyone that would be convinced with that kind of an explanation, but I don't pursue the matter any further.

This event ends on his command.

This 'episode' has already been completed.

—The boy entrusted with secretly fighting peculiarities using his "supernatural power".

He boldly fights against enemies that appear one by one, and continues to protect this world to this day—

I'm aware of it. This is *that* kind of story.

The boy I call Ryuga...is a protagonist-like existence.

While we're both high school students, he obviously lives in a different realm from me. This world that I live in undoubtedly centers around him. This is not something that comes from my delusions, but something I'm convinced about.

How can such a person live as a carefree student? There's no use thinking about it. There's no choice but to acknowledge that that's the way it is.

—Anyways, this world is the “stage” of a story, with him as the leading actor.

The main story progresses without any place for me to get involved. He's the main character in a story set to have an Armageddon-like, Ragnarök-like, God's Judgement-like, heroic battle with an evil peculiarity.

And there would also be “companion characters” that fight along his side.

There would also be lovely “heroine characters”.

Of course, as you can see, there are also “enemy characters” that are to be defeated.

Then there are many others, the “mob characters” that can play a role.

Everything in this world exists for the sake of the story, I think that everyone is just one of the characters.

Even if it means not having anything to do with the main story for the rest of my life, I think it's fine to be part of the “people who live peacefully without knowing anything”.

.....So, what kind of person am I? Well, let me introduce myself.

My name is Kobayashi Ichirou.

I exist as the “friend character” of the protagonist.

My position is in, as what anime and light novels call it, the “daily life part”.

A minor character who bears the burden of comic relief within the interval-like parts of the protagonist's story to balance out the serious storyline.

That is my role.

At least, I recognize my existence as such.

Chapter 1

Part 1

To repeat myself, my name is Kobayashi Ichirou.

Even if I say so myself, I think it's a pretty generic name. Too generic to the point that it becomes hard to remember. Nowadays, people can have some unique names. The reason for my name is, of course, because I'm the eldest son.

I'm a second-year student that goes to Oumei High School.

It's an uneventful school, there are no overwhelmingly talented students nor are there extremely bad students. There aren't any clubs that participate in national competitions.

I myself have no special characteristics worth mentioning. I have a medium build and my looks are probably average as well. No doubt, I'm a guy that's the incarnation of "that high school student you can find just about anywhere."

...For argument's sake, if I was the novelist, I'd make someone like me a background character.

If I were to be involved with the main story, I'd soon be eaten up by one of the peculiarities. Being a pathetic victim is the only purpose I see myself having.

Being the person that I am, that'd be about the degree of my existence after all...I've come to realize such things long ago. I already became self-conscious at the time that I became aware of what was going on around me.

However, you could say that even I have one special skill.

It's the "talent for support."

Even if it's impossible for me to stand out, I can make others stand out. To elevate, to make one shine, to promote—that's the kind of skill that I excel at.

And now, with some luck, I was able to get the best position of "the protagonist's friend."

I'm entrusted with the important task of being a supporting character that can make a full demonstration of being on the sidelines.

Never once have I desired to be a "protagonist."

As a small child, I only cheered for the red ranger in the hero squadron. After all, I looked down on the other colors.

An opportunity to be aware of my "supporting role" showed up in kindergarten, when we were doing a play. I played the part of an animal that accompanied Momotarou. *(TLN: Momotarou is a character of Japanese folklore.)*

However, my role was not a monkey, nor a pheasant, nor a dog, but a frilled lizard. There were too many kindergartners for the ordinary cast so we had to add some original characters. I believe there was also a racoon, a seal, and an alpaca. Being mindful of what parents were thinking, we weren't established as Momotarou's servants, but instead were "his friends."

(I also wanted to play Momotarou...but I'm quite plain)

Even though I had such thoughts, I still carried out my roll as a frilled lizard. In the end, I protected my close friend, Momotarou, from a demon attack and became the only ally to die in the heat of the action.

"Don't cry Momotarou...there are things that you must do..."

While saying so, I died as a frilled lizard. Of course, such a development wasn't in the script, but I wanted to enliven the climax in my own way.

After the play was over, the teacher was crying. The teacher gave me praises by saying "Ichirou, your frilled lizard was top notch. You made Momorou, played by Takashi, look like a real hero." My parents also admired me.

At that moment, I had an indescribable feeling of accomplishment, an uplifting sensation, a sense of fulfillment—

No doubt, that was the start of the Kobayashi Ichirou that I currently am.

From that looking point on, when looking at the hero squadron, I cared more about the green ranger than the red one. He was not part of the main story, but the green ranger, who was an accompanying member, had now been on my

mind.

As it escalated, I began paying attention to characters that weren't even members of the squadron. a doctor, a secretary, an ordinary father, and so forth.

They occasionally made their appearances, the very young child that was I continued to look at them with a passion. However, there was nobody who understood this feeling.

Everybody was just cheering for the main character...I even remember my mother saying "There's no vinyl figure of the father."

Even when I went to hero show in the summer of my second grade, there were only the squadron members. Those in the same generation as me, who were delighted, didn't understand me.

(Everyone's taking the supporting characters too lightly. The story doesn't just revolve around the main characters. There are a lot of characters deep within the world...)

Such discontent grew once I entered fifth grade, and my thoughts turned into actions.

Within the class, I drew closer to obscurity and decided to make someone else shine.

A protagonist's appeal can grow depending on their friends and sub-characters...I did some experiments and observations to confirm such thoughts.

To start, I kept an eye on the transfer student, Ishida. He was a soccer boy from Okinawa who didn't quite blend in with the class because of his shy personality. During recess, he'd always seclude himself into the corner of the playground and juggle a soccer ball by himself.

I kept an eye on him during recess and soon tried to make contact with him.

"Ishida! Don't just juggle a soccer ball, practice your shots too!"

Ishida was startled towards the sudden greeting.

"K, Kobayashi...?"

“You’re like a protagonist, you’re probably an ace striker! C’mon, strike it! I’ll be the goalkeeper!”

“Kobayashi, are you interested in soccer as well?”

“Nope! If you want, we can do ping pong!”

From that day, I was the currently confused Ishida’s friend and coach.

It seemed he was apt towards being a forward, and Ishida improved in the blink of an eye. With his strength in breaking through, he was able to compete with the head of the team, and was able to rush out towards a spot skillfully.

Meanwhile, I diligently familiarized the class with soccer and setup basic games during recess. I talked with the teacher, and changed the ball game tournament from basketball to soccer.

As for Ishida, he went in a direction that leaned towards his Okinawan tastes. His catchphrase was “we’ll manage somehow” and he named his shot the “Chinsuko Bazooka.” *(TLN: His catchphrase is phrase that comes from Okinawa and Chinsuko is a sweet that comes from Okinawa)*

“Hey, Kobayashi. I’m wondering if I really need to name my shot...”

“Idiot! You need to make your character distinct! If you’re being serious about this, I also want you to always be chewing on a sugar cane!”

“I, I don’t want to!”

Thanks to the effects of me promoting him, Ishida became the leader of the class before anyone realized. I also know that he had six girls who had a crush on him.

The kid that nobody used to know back in elementary school was now “Soccer Ishida from Okinawa”the experiment was a great success.

“Kobayashi, why would you go this far for me?”

“Because I’m just a sub-character. Unlike you, I’m just ordinary and lack individuality.”

“My accomplishments are thanks to your assistance, Kobayashi...I really appreciate it, Kobayashi. If it weren’t for you, I would have been alone

forever—”

After that. The modest Ishida once again moved away before we were done with elementary school.

According to his letter, he passed the selection process and entered the club team. It seems he has yet to meet someone who has breathed more life into him than me.

(It seems my support sense is the real deal. Also, being the supporting roles is kinda fun...I want to support more and more characters!)

I, being enthusiastic, expanded the range of my activities once entering junior high school.

One time, to fulfill Yamashita's quest for love, I got involved with another girl. I approached her while saying "It's all good, so let me keep you company for a bit", then Yamashita came running and rescued her. The two became an open couple.

Yamashita was impressed and said "Kobayashi, you were really good at acting like a delinquent."

I also made Watanabe, a delinquent, the boss of the school. I knocked down an opponent that was too much for him to handle and had Watanabe take the credit.

Watanabe was a bit frightened and said "Kobayashi...I feel like I won't be able to win against you in my entire life."

I also made the student council president, Sekiguchi, the top scorer of the school. I stuck with him and tutored him on what we were studying, and then he got full marks on his tests in all subjects. Of course, it wouldn't be good if the protagonist were to cheat.

Sekiguchi groaned while saying "Kobayashi...how are you able to better keep up in your studies compared to me..."

Like that, I played the role of various friend characters and produced a lot of "red ranger-like existences." Thanks to that, my number of friends had idly increased.

However—deep down in my heart, I was still feeling frustrated.

(This isn't it. These people aren't the ones. I want to support someone who's like a genuine protagonist. The one who has the universe revolving around them, the true hero. Where could they be? I want the ideal one, the protagonist amongst protagonists.")

I graduated from junior high with such a hunger, and then there was my first day at Oumei High School.

I met him.

It was roughly a year ago since I first met him. It was when the school entrance ceremony had finished, and I set foot into the classroom.

—With a single glance, I could tell that he was no ordinary person.

Among the classmates that were chatting and having a fun time, he stood alone next to the window. The air around him was obviously different from the other people in the background.

(Say, this person...looks a bit like a star idol.)

The front and back of his hair wavered in the drifting wind. While he had a slender physique, he gave off a bit of a dignified air. Even the school bag he placed under his feet looked a bit divine.

While giving off such a "special aura", he leaned against the window and stared outside.

While having a calm profile, his eyes held a powerful light in them. It was as if he was a strong character that was saying "Hmm, I've got good eyes. These pupils will pierce directly without hesitation."

(I see. This guy is definitely the genuine red ranger. No, he's at the level of being scarlet or crimson. Who the heck are you? Where did you come from?)

Noticing that, I went straight towards before even checking my seat.

I want to know more about him. I want to know his detailed character setting...my blood as a supporter was getting me flustered.

"Hey, are you a part of this class?"

For the being, I decided to try and say those words. Though that's the case, anything would work for a greeting.

"Well, I too didn't have any acquaintances here, so I was starting to get worried. Nice to meet you."

Despite saying that, he only took a light glance at me and soon turned his line of sight back to what was outside. He seemed to be acting in a sketchy way. Well, I'm used to these types of people.

"I'm Kobayashi. Kobayashi Ichirou. And you are?"

"...Hinomori Ryuuga."

That was the first shock.

"H, Hinomori...Ryuuga?"

At that moment, there was a gap like that of heaven and earth between my name, "Kobayashi Ichirou," and his. I had "woods" in my name while he had "forest." His had just one more tree. There doesn't seem to be anything that points to the origin of his name.

(TLN: This makes no sense without knowing Japanese kanji. Basically, both guys have names that include a kanji character relating to trees. The name Kobayashi contains the “林” character while the name Hinomori contains “森”. The character for ‘tree’ is “木”; notice how the name Hinomori has one more tree in said character it contains).

I never met a guy who had such a protagonist-like name before.

"O, oh, that's a pretty cool name. It's like something out of an anime or light novel."

"I don't like this name that much."

"Huh? Why?"

"I feel that...it's one that continues to be tied down by fate until one's death."

—Oh. Oh-hoh.

"Isn't it fine? It's a pretty protagonist-like, isn't it?"

This guy might just be the real deal. This may very well be the man that I've

been looking for!

“Anyways, let’s get along well, Hinomori. Ah, is it okay if I call you Ryuga?”

“I don’t particularly mind...but I will tell you just this.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s better if you don’t get involved with me that much. This is for your own sake, Kobayashi, okay?”

“.....”

Normally, someone would probably think ‘what is guy talking about?’, but my heart went soaring. That line had almost a perfect score in my book.

—So cool! This guy seriously has to be the protagonist, right?

Then the homeroom teacher arrived, thus ending my first conversation with Ryuuga.

However, my second shock waited within the class’ self-introductions that were done afterwards.

“I’m Hinomori Ryuuga. Until I became a high schooler, I lived in one of the most secluded locations of China due to family circumstances.”

What’s with that! What kind of circumstances!

Distinct name, distinct circumstances—I’d already been captivated by Hinomori Ryuuga by that stage. It was to the point that I don’t even remember what kind of self-introduction I made at all.

I want to be friends with him. I want to play the supporting role for this guy... such things were the only thoughts in my head.

This was something I heard later on, but apparently I had introduced myself by saying “I’m Ryuga’s close friend, Kobayashi.”

From that day, I followed after Hinomori Ryuuga.

Morning, between classes, lunch, after school. I had only talked to him for a minute. Since he had that distant feeling to him, I decided to approach him as a super-tense fool.

In the beginning, Ryuuga showed a plainly annoyed expression, but after several months, it got the point where he would respond to me. Gradually, his attitude softened, and he eventually began to show a smile.

“Ah hah hah. You’re a fool, Ichirou. I’m not that simple.”

“Who’s are you calling an idiot! I’m being serious! After all, I was able to squeeze out a conversation from you!”

“What do you even want to me to say?”

“If I mutter ‘what is the capital of Belgium’, you’re supposed to say ‘Brussels, sir.’”

“Absolutely not.”

Looking into Ryuuga’s true nature, he’s a lot more simple than I thought and he’s pretty skilled at playing the straight man. Gradually, my character began to have a good compatibility with his.

“Leaving that aside, Ryuga, how about we go to a pool? There’s a pretty big one in the neighboring town.”

“Sorry, but I don’t like to swim that much.”

“Swimming is just an excuse! What we’re really going there for is the eye-candy! What comes to mind when you think about a pool!”

“Let me end this with some brief words; that’s as far as I’ll let you go.”

—As the time we spent together, both in and out of school, increased, I had confirmed that Ryuuga was definitely the protagonist. And such a thought grew day by day.

First of all, this guy almost never talks about his past.

When asked about his time before high school, he always dodges the question by saying “I don’t have any stories worth talking about.” Only in anime will you find such a protagonist.

Also, this guy frequently slips out of class.

As soon as he comes back, he gets extremely tired, blood comes out from his lips, the sleeves and cuffs of his uniform get torn, and so forth. Only in light

novels will you find such a protagonist.

Not to mention, this guy holds some unusual abilities.

I had once peeped in on him using an aura from his hands to burn a manga magazine, after which he slumped down while saying “I didn’t get to finish it...” Only in serialized works, like that one he was reading, would you find such a protagonist.

(This is seriously it. This guy is fighting hidden peculiarities, a genuine hero! He’s what I’d been originally looking for, a real hero!)

I never thought the peculiarities that were monsters could have existed, but such trivial matters aren’t worth worrying about.

I finally met him. Oh, how I want to be the one and only person to be this guy’s support! To support the one who’s the center of this universe, the protagonist of protagonists!

...Before long, we entered the second year of high school and we were once again in the same class. At that moment, Ryuuga said something.

“It’s nice to be together again. Let’s get along well, Ichirou.”

“Huh?”

“At first you were a bit annoying, but now, you’re someone precious to me, Ichirou.”

“Ryuga...”

“Only when I’m with you am I able to forget about my mission...ah, never mind what I just said.”

When hearing those words, I was ecstatic and felt like saying “you can depend on me!”

I had been accepted as a friend character of the protagonist.

From then on, I could stay by his side. I had passed Ryuuga’s audition!

My “friend character life” has thus reached to the present.

He’s able to smile in front of me now, but I think that Ryuuga was definitely a tough one. After all, he carries the fate of this world on his shoulders. I’m

worried that he might go bald from the stress.

I can't do much since I'm not supposed to know about everything. No matter what, whenever one of his secrets slips, I have no choice but to turn a blind eye towards it.

But that's fine. If I'm being honest, I'm not that interested in the Ryuuga that's a part of the main storyline. As far as I'm concerned, the Ryuuga that I know is the Ryuuga in the "moments of peace."

I'm not Ryuuga's "companion", but just a "friend"...I can't be a frilled lizard fighting alongside him, but instead a more low-key frilled lizard. I'm planning to build up enough experience to do so.

In the "daily life part", I do my best to help him forget his worries. I provide the usual moments of comfort and entertainment to Ryuuga.

That is my mission as Kobayashi Ichirou.

I'm certain that there's nobody else around Ryuuga who can take this position other than me.

Part 2

It's already been a year since I met Hinomori Ryuuga.

In just that amount of time we've been together, I've gotten to know him pretty well.

Needless to say, Ryuuga is a pretty cliché protagonist. He falls within what's known as a stereotype. Well, he himself isn't aware that he's a protagonist, but since that would have an adverse effect on his extraordinary character, I think that's fine.

—Ryuuga does not take part in any club activities at school.

Since he doesn't know when an enemy might emerge, it's reasonable to say that he's part of the "go-home club." He's a youth engaged in the endless battle between light and darkness.

—In addition, Ryuuga often gets dragged into mysterious events.

In this town, "phenomena that can't be explained with modern science" or "cases of unidentified life-forms attacking humans" happen quite often, but they soon die down once Ryuuga gets involved. Of course, he knocks down the main culprit, the enemy peculiarity, behind it.

—That's how Ryuuga is, but he stubbornly insists that he's just "a very ordinary high school student."

At that point, it's pretty much the equivalent of a middle-aged man coming out of a women's restroom with a camera in one hand while saying "I'm nobody suspicious." Ordinary high school students don't just suddenly notice malicious peculiarities.

However, I don't press him about it. I just magnificently let it slide.

When being as skilled of a friend as me, one can see through such bare-faced cover-ups and look into "the protagonist's beauty of form."

—And there's always guaranteed to be beauties surrounding Hinomori Ryuuga.

There's his sister, a lovely angelic junior high schooler, Hinomori Kyouka.

The one who was like an idol within the school, Yukimiya Shiori.

The cool expert of the sword who was like Yamato Nadeshiko, Aogasaki Rei.
(TLN: *Yamato Nadeshiko represents a sort of ideal figure of women in ancient Japan.*)

The mysterious transfer student, Elmira McCartney. She's got scarlet colored hair.

There's also a childhood friend, who he's reunited with after several years, and some other people, but they're all beauties that are a bit unorthodox and they're quite different in type, as they're the more pushy heroines.

However, all of these people are quite the burden for me.

Whenever any of them appear in front of Ryuuga, I have to do my "job."

I have to bicker with Ryuuga each and every time.

I have to say things like "H, hey Ryuga! How did you get acquainted with Yukimiya!"

Or things like "W, why did the beautiful swordswoman Aogasaki come to the classroom to specifically meet Ryuga?!"

Or things like "E, E, Elmira! What is it that you see in Ryuga!". I had to act frantically and make a fuss.

I'd make excessive reactions of shock, jealousy, complaining, and so forth, towards the ever-so-popular protagonist...this is the most basic of basics in regards to being a friend character, but it's not easy at all.

This uses up more energy than it looks like it would.

Even I have days where I'm in low spirits. Yet even so, I can't abandon my duties. I have to cause a commotion whenever necessary.

Sometimes they run into each other and things develop into a fight, which causes great suffering for Ryuuga.

In such cases, I don't forget to act cocky and say "Hmph, notice anything Ryuga?" Upon which, Ryuuga always says "...Jeez." That's his catchphrase.

As an aside, the heroines are all neck-to-neck as of now. It seems that none of them have managed to greatly reduce the distance between themselves and Ryuuga.

I wonder which heroine will be able to win Ryuuga over...Personally, I'd like it if things would quicken up so that he'd get out of this harem situation. It's all so wishy-washy.

Actually, not all candidates have entered the battle as of yet.

It's possible that more heroines will appear here and there in the future, expanding Ryuuga's harem. At least two or three more perhaps?

I'm concerned about Ryuuga's resilience. I'm also concerned about my blood pressure. But...eh, whatever. Let things come as they may.

No matter what character shows up, I'll act exhilarated. I'll say "C, c, cuuuuute!" while having hearts in my eyes.

If I'm being honest, I think that women are just bothersome creatures, but I'm not going to let such hidden thoughts slip out.

The reason for that—is because I'm a pro at being a friend character.

"Hey Ryuga, let's eat together."

It's lunch break. Today I once again called out to Ryuuga while holding a pouch of bread from the convenience store.

My chances of eating lunch with him haven't been so high recently. Probably about a one in five chance of succeeding?'

In most cases, Ryuuga is eventually taken away by one of the heroine/candidates. He's taken to the empty rooftop, an unused classroom, or at times someplace outside of the school.

There's no use voicing any complaints. They're the main characters in the story. It'd be natural for them to take priority over a sub-character like me.

However...today, there are fortunately no heroines to interrupt us. It seems this is the part where the friend is in focus.

"Hey Ryuga, listen. I've updated my 'list of beauties.'"

So, I'll talk on and on about information of the girls in the campus that are considered cute. I take out the secret notebook I'm prideful of and leak dates of birth, heights, weights, blood types, three sizes, and other such things to Ryuuga.

...To tell the truth, I'm really not interested about these things. I'd rather memorize a chronological table than memorize the profile of any woman.

However, I have to tell these things to Ryuuga. I have to talk while having a self-satisfied look and seem amazed. This is a bit of an old-fashioned friend type, but this is the kind of character I've decided on.

"Ichirou...what are you doing researching such things?"

Naturally, Ryuuga sighed and looked at me while narrowing his eyes. He's got scornful eyes.

"I don't know how you got this information, but it'll be a problem if you get caught, you know."

"It'll be fine. I'm paying close attention not to let personal information be public. I'm only leaking these things to you because you're my close friend."

"I wish you would make use of that energy for other things, though..."



While having a milk carton straw in his mouth, Ryuuga once again sighed as

he said “Jeez.”

I completely feel the same way as him. What’s the meaning in investigating someone else’s three sizes during their growth period? My weight fluctuates by one or two kilograms in a month. This task produces way too fruitless results considering the effort it requires.

But I have no choice. After all, I believe that a “perverted fool” has good compatibility with a cool protagonist as a friend.

Once I start acting like that, the homeroom teacher Minegishi gets irritated. As a teacher, that person is way too serious and work-heavy.

The homeroom teacher of the protagonist is supposed to be lax and unserious.

They’re supposed to frequently have class be a self-study session so that the protagonist has an opportunity to slip out. Then the protagonist is supposed to say “Jeez, is this school alright?”

In addition, Minegishi is a middle-aged man.

The one in charge of the protagonist’s class is supposed to be a female teacher. They’re supposed to be a sexy lady, an extremely loli girl, or a clumsy air-headed woman. Minegishi, you pack a weak punch.

Perhaps Minegishi will be swapped over to somewhere else—as I was thinking as such,

“Ough, guh...!”

Ryuuga suddenly clutched his chest and groaned in pain.

His whole body trembled, his eyes were wide open, he was bustling within his uniform. It seemed like he was frantically trying to struggle against something.

This is just a guess, but perhaps the “overly mighty power” dwelling within his body was running wild. He’s likely holding a power that’s normally something outside the capacity of humans, a dangerous power even for gods and demons to use.

It was pretty pitiful looking at him breaking into a cold sweat from his forehead, but I hardened my heart and spoke.

“Ba ha ha. What are you fooling around for, Ryuga?”

...If I were a genuine friend, I wouldn't make such a reaction. I wanted to make a serious expression and tell him my true feelings of worry.

However, I can't allow such actions of anxiety. It's necessary for me to be a “carefree fellow that doesn't even know a bit about the protagonist's hardships” to the bitter end.

It's the role of the heroines to heroically aid Ryuuga. There would only be trouble if some useless guy were to do it.

So because of that—HEY, anyone will do, so someone come here quick. Do something about Ryuuga.

There's a golden aura that's coming out of his back. This is seriously distressing!

“*gasp, gasp.....*pant*”

Oh, he got better. Ryuuga recovered without waiting for a heroine to show up.

I wonder if he's okay. Was it not necessary to urgently call out to a beauty for help?

This was the chance for one of them to break through and get ahead, but what the heck are all of them doing right now? At this rate, nobody will win the position of the main heroine. If a heroine had messed up because they had plans, they would get axed.

While I was confused, Ryuuga soon lifted his head.

“H, hey Ryuga, are you alright? Nothing wrong?”

Ryuuga, seeming to interpret my panic as “simple worrying,” made an awkward smile while breathing heavily.

“Oh, my bad...it's nothing.”

“.....”

“Don't mind it. It's really nothing.”

There's no way that it's just nothing.

There was an aura coming out, was there not? There was a light was coming out of both of his eyes, was there not? There was mysterious rumble in the background, was there not?

However, it's of course strictly forbidden to point that out. I soon returned to a more optimistic expression, as if thinking "Did you not get enough sleep?"

"If it's nothing in particular, then that's good. Make sure to get proper sleep, alright?"

"Oh, I understand."

"Perhaps you've been playing games until late at night. Or perhaps, you were reading porn? Show me, c'mon, c'mon."

"Ah ha ha. Maybe it was something like that."

Even for me, this is a stupid conversation.

What groans of pain come from a lack of sleep? Who would ignore that aura? It was taking the form of a dragon.

When we first met, there was a period where I doubted Ryuuga, thinking that he was just an ordinary case of chuunibyou. However, as you can see, this guy wasn't joking. *(TLN: Chuunibyou is a Japanese term for when people, often middle schoolers, become delusional and act like they have special powers or other stuff like that.)*

It was thanks to Ryuuga's efforts that "the incidents of people turning into stone" was resolved the other day.

"—Ryuuga. Come with me for a bit."

It was after school that day.

Overhearing the conversation during lunch from who-knows-where, Aogasaki Rei stormed into the classroom.

With just her entry, the classroom went into a commotion. She had an appearance that splendidly blended the heroism of a still samurai and the proportions of a model...when her penetrating eyes made a swift glance over the room, two girls immediately fainted.

Not minding her surroundings, Aogasaki swept her long ponytail, briskly walked over to Ryuuga, then grabbed his arm, forcing him to stand up.

“A, A, Aogasaki’s here for Ryuga again! Just what kind of relationship do those two—”

“Kobayashi. I have no leisure to pay attention to you today. Sorry, I’ll be borrowing Ryuuga.”

My job didn’t work, Aogasaki takes along Ryuuga. She’s a heroine/candidate and yet she’s taller than Ryuuga. I think she’s around 170 centimeters.

“Let me go in place of Ryuga! Even if it’s to a hotel or a women’s restroom!”

“Restrain yourself, pervert.”

Aogasaki took one glare at me and then left.

I thought about heading home with Ryuuga, but I can’t oppose the intervention of a heroine/candidate. She’s a much more important character than me.

(...Perhaps I’ll go take a quick look)

After hesitating for a bit, I decided to secretly follow after the two.

Although I’ve been taking a hands-off approach on the main storyline so far, it may be better to know an outline of Ryuuga’s abilities when thinking about it.

At the very least, I’d like to understand the meaning of that dragon-like aura... those were my thoughts.

(Presumably, that was a guardian deity or something similar dwelling within Ryuuga...does it have a name or something?)

Fortunately, the two were headed towards the school dojo. Since there seems to be no club activities today, the only ones in there are Ryuuga and Aogasaki.

Ryuuga was in the center of the dojo, meditating while sitting cross-legged.

While Ryuuga was doing so, Aogasaki spoke while wearing her kendo uniform. Thanks to the silence within the room, I can hear their voices pretty well when leaning against the door.

“Ryuuga, it seems the guardian deity is running wild.”

...So it really was a guardian deity after all.

"I know. I've managed to suppress it up until now."

"It may be truly awakening because of the increase in opportunities to unleash its power. A great 'dragon king' is laying dormant inside you."

...So it really was a dragon king after all.

"Even so, it'll be fine. I won't get swallowed up by this thing's power."

"I understand, Ryuuga. If it's you, you'll certainly be able to manage the 'dragon king.' You're the only man who I acknowledge."

They were still continuing to talk, but I left the dojo.

First of all, I got the basic information already. I don't need to know any more than this. It's fine if I just know only a part of a main character.

Though I'd never carelessly make a slip of the tongue, it's best not to keep listening. There's a huge difference in importance between this and a woman's three sizes.

(Even so...a 'dragon king', was it?)

Perhaps this a little too cliché.

I wonder if it'll turn out to be something from Western mythology, like the Leviathan, Jörmungandr, or

Quetzalcoatl. That's the only thing I'm concerned about.

Of course, I'm aware that not everything goes according to fiction.

Ryuuga's story is a real drama. A surreal reality. So, there's no particular reason for him to be defeated so easily.

At the very least though, I'll just keep pulling out names for a little longer...

Part 3

The weekdays passed without a hitch and then came Sunday.

Just because school is off doesn't mean I get time off. Besides being a friend, I also hang out around the town with Ryuuga. The school isn't the only stage in this theater for me.

Whenever I see Ryuuga in casual attire, I have to take some caution.

Even though I'm a comic relief sub-character, I'm a close friend of the protagonist. I can't dress up fancily, but I can't be sloppy either. Above all, it's important not to have my fashion overlap with the protagonist's.

Well, today we didn't make any plans to go anywhere.

Perhaps I can forget about my duties and slowly wind down...at least, that's what I thought, but something arose.

I unexpectedly came across the school's idol, Yukimiya Shiori, in front of the station.

"Huh, Yukimiya? Are you meeting someone?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Perhaps it's Ryuga?"

When I asked that, Yukimiya suddenly turned red and cast her eye's downwards. I see, perhaps Ryuuga has one those "date events" today?

Since Yukimiya is one of those virtuous and pure heroines, her casual attire is a thick white dress. Her dress matches perfectly well with her long, beige hair that reaches down to her back. She was carrying a somewhat small basket in her hands, most likely a homemade lunch she made for Ryuuga.

...Yukimiya Shiori was the object of affection for all of the boys in the school, a daughter of a respectable family.

She was gentle, kind to everyone, but was also ignorant about the ways of the world. Her somewhat modest chest was a bit of a pity, but she's one of the candidates for being the core of Ryuuga's harem.

Despite being an honor student with top-ranking scores, she often sneaks out of class with Ryuuga. It seems that they fight alongside one another.

In other words, Yukimiya is also someone with unusual abilities.

“Um, if I remember correctly, you’re Hinomori’s friend.”

“Right!”

I make a lively reply towards what Yukimiya said, as if I’m some kind of kindergartner.

This is to be expected for Yukimiya. I’m an inconsequential character, but I won’t treat her harshly. I just give a soft smile towards her like the “great god of researching one’s three sizes” that I am.

“Kobayashi Ichirou, right?”

“Huh? Oh, right right, Kobayashi! Wow~, I’m so impressed that you know my name.”

...To think that I, of all people, would be late on their reaction.

It’s quite thoughtful of her to remember my name even though she takes her class in the adjacent classroom. However, in this case, it’d be better if she wasn’t being thoughtful.

This isn’t how you should do things, Yukimiya.

There was something wrong with that name being said just now.

It would have been better to mispronounce my name as Oobayashi or Nakabayashi. This was supposed to be the once in a lifetime chance to show your mischievous side!

So, I can’t say that she said it correctly, because in fact, she said it incorrectly.

While she does carry the attribute of a virtuous heroine, she shouldn’t lose her focus. Such characters like her often get outdone by other heroines/candidates.

I think that for Yukimiya Shiori to take the position of the main heroine, she needs to have a wicked side to her.

“U, um, by the way Kobayashi. If you have the time, is it okay if I ask you a

question?”

Yukimiya says so while being ignorant of my disappointment.

“A question? What is it?”

“Umm, well...”

Yukimiya was suddenly acting bashful.

While looking up at me from time to time, she hesitated for a moment before continuing.

“Is that hard to ask?”

“No, not really...but, what is Hinomori normally like...?”

I made a grin in my mind towards what Yukimiya muttered in a fading voice. I see, so that’s how it is.

She wants to know how the protagonist is from the perspective of a male friend—those feelings are of course natural for a heroine. It can be said that this is one of my duties.

That shy expression and the way you’re fidgeting with your fingers is brilliant. Are you sure you’re not consciously doing this, Yukimiya? You’ve already made up for those points I’ve subtracted from you a bit ago.

“How is Ryuga normally? Hmmm, let me think.”

This is the critical moment where I have to suppress my desire to sing praises of Ryuga. First I have to cut him down with just a few words.

“That guy’s—a bit of a weirdo.”

“W, weirdo?”

“Yeah. I don’t understand his thought process, it’s been hard hanging out with him recently, and his parents are always on long business trips and rarely come home, so his cooking skills are unnecessarily high.

As Yukimiya was confused, I continue my slandering. While I was at it, I also nonchalantly tell her about his family circumstances.

It’s painful having to denounce my close friend, but this is also my duty.

“But, well...unlike me, Ryuga is firm in his beliefs. I’m sure that he’d definitely treasure his girlfriend.”

And finally at the end, I put myself down and instantly praise Ryuuga.

This is elevation through self-deprecation. This raises my status as well. Since I’m a good friend of Ryuuga, I’m also a character that understands him.

“Do your best, Yukimiya. The competition for Ryuuga is high, though.”

“I, i, it’s not like I have any feelings in particular for him.”

Yukimiya Shiori turns bright red and shakes her head. A good reaction you got there, Yukimiya.

“You’re going on a date with Ryuga, right? That guy’s a fan of fairly passionate movies. He told me that a movie he wants to watch is currently screening, so now’s a pretty good time to invite him there, isn’t it?”

“T, thanks for the advice...”

Though she turns red up to her ears, Yukimiya bowed her head and behaved courteously. Unfortunately, this is about as much help as I can give. I can’t afford to support one heroine too much.

Well, since Ryuuga is about to make his way here, I should probably get going.

(...Wait.)

At that moment, a single worry flashed into my mind. “Is this really alright?”

Leaving behind the protagonist and getting involved with a heroine...maybe I was overstepping my boundaries as a friend?

Yukimiya’s heart ultimately belongs to Ryuuga. Things will turn serious if a flag gets raised as a result of me arbitrarily getting involved with her. It’s not like you can know where a flag will show up.

Perhaps I wasn’t taking enough concern. Maybe it would have been better to just greet her and leave. Now that Yukimiya gave her thanks, I realized that I may have acted rashly.

Perhaps I should correct this to put things back into order...

“—Yukimiya. Actually, forget about what happened just now.”

“Come again?”



Yukimiya tilted her head towards me, as I had suddenly made a serious expression.

“I didn’t pass by here. I didn’t come across you. Alright?”

“O...kay?”

Yukimiya stared blankly, not understanding what was happening. She’s a woman that’s bad at inferring things. If I explain in detail though, Ryuuga will arrive.

“In any case, we didn’t meet! Don’t say anything to Ryuga!”

“What do you mean by that...?”

“Just go with it! If you tell him, then be prepared to get a taste of my rolling elbow!”

I make sure to threaten her then run away, after which I lurk inside a place hidden from view and observe Yukimiya.

And before long, Ryuuga showed up. He greeted Yukimiya by saying “Sorry for making you wait!” while having his usual refreshing smile.

I cautiously observe the situation, carefully selecting my timing.

Don’t rush it. Not yet. Just a little more...okay, now!

As soon as the two were about to walk, I waited for the opportune moment and then stepped out. I smoothly approached the two while having a nonchalant look.

“Oh, Ichirou.”

Noticing me, Ryuuga suddenly raised his hand.

I also raised my hand in response, and immediately changed my expression.

I turned my line of sight towards Yukimiya. I had been chatting with her like normal just a moment ago.

“Hey Ryuga. And...Y, Y, Yukimiya?!”

If I do say so myself, my acting is as realistic as Robert De Niro’s.

I look at the two in amazement, repeatedly open and close my mouth, and

topple to the floor. I then shed bitter tears.

“W, why are you with Yukimiya! What’s the meaning of this! Is it a date? It’s a date, isn’t it?! I thought we had gotten awfully close recently, but was that just the extent of our relationship?!”

“Y, you’ve got it wrong.”

People passing by take notice of us.

Startled by my shrieks, a housewife’s chihuahua begins to yelp. Hey, don’t disturb me. I’m on a roll right now.

“I’m by my overly lonesome self on this Sunday and yet you’re doing this!”

“Shiori and I don’t have that kind of relationship...”

“Why are you calling her by her first name!”

I rolled around on the ground while writhing, swinging my arms and legs around like a spoiled brat. However, I don’t forget to maintain my breathing.

“In the first place, don’t you already have your childhood friend Rina! Don’t you have Rina, who lives next to you, whose family you’re acquainted with, and who’s in the second year E Class!”

Perhaps that was a little too descriptive. Eh, whatever.

“Calm down, Ichirou.”

“I am calm! Damn it! What’s with you!”

...Yukimiya Shiori was dumbfounded.

She opened her eyes wide, as if silently saying “What are you doing?” towards me.

Part 4

It was now the next day. A new week began and it was Monday.

As if what occurred at the train station never happened, I continued telling Ryuuga the three sizes of the school's girls like usual.

"Hey, Ichirou. Shiori is really just a friend."

Ryuuga was still trying to make such explanations, but that doesn't really matter.

That scene back then where I was screaming and running away was to fulfill my duty.

That's all it is—a new mission.

Once school ended, I took Ryuuga, who was being sour, to the dojo. The purpose was to peek at Aogasaki Rei changing her clothes.

Such events are essential in the "daily life parts." Ryuuga would get tired out if it were only just battles. It's necessary for him to have some proper relaxation.

Now, the target this time is Aogasaki, but...she's a swordswoman character and the only heroine that's a third-year student.

She's the tall, attentive, and dignified type of beauty. Her tone of voice and personality are also quite nice. However, she's a heroine/candidate equipped with a certain component of a woman that places her at a cut above the rest, "huge breasts." They're voluptuous even when peeking at her from behind, where her ponytail and her nape are visible, quite the force to be reckoned with.

As an aside, Aogasaki is not part of the kendo club. She only comes to the dojo and practices whenever the club doesn't meet, like before and today.

She said her reason was something along the lines of "It wouldn't be fair for me to participate in students' kendo" but...in reality, it's for the same reason as why Ryuuga is part of the go-home club.

Aogasaki is also a “companion character” that fights alongside Ryuuga. One time, I saw her cut a rampaging dump truck right in half. I pretended not to see it.

“Hey Ichirou, we really should stop. Doing things like this isn’t good.”

“Don’t chicken out after coming this far. Beyond this window lies a paradise you’ve only ever seen in your dreams up until now. It’s the El Dorado.”

The locker room was next to the dojo. Creeping up to the window from the outside of the school building, Ryuuga and I crouched while being on alert. As expected, the one who appeared after the curtains opened was Aogasaki.

Then we quietly peeked through the window...Since this is the daily life part, there has to be some thrilling developments. It’s the duty of the friend to produce them. This is what it means to live up to your reputation as a pervert character.

“A, alright, let’s go Ryuga. Don’t let this slip by. Carve what you see into your mind.”

“...Jeez.”

As opposed to me, who was getting bloodshot eyes, I felt that Ryuuga was in extremely low spirits.

Well, it’s not uncommon for a protagonist to have a low libido. It’d be troubling if he was panting in excitement along with me. The amount of dignity this guy is putting on is just about right.

“Sneaking, sneaking...”

I erased all signs of my presence and carefully peeked into the window with caution.

Sure enough, Aogasaki’s defenseless back and pale skin were exposed. She had already put on her uniform’s skirt, but her bra on the upper-half of her body was still visible.

—Now, it’s time to do my “real duty.”

Take a gander. This is my craftsmanship. This is my talent as a friend character.

“A, a, achoo!”

I made a grand sneeze right then and there.

I let it out at full volume as if it were natural, I had been practicing since last night.

Aogasaki quickly looks this way. While covering her chest with the blouse of her uniform, she reaches for a nearby wooden sword.

“Ah! Not good! We got caught!”

Needless to say, this is actually good. It’s all going according to the plan.

Lewd offenses often end as just attempts. Then afterwards, the perpetrator gets rewarded with a punch—that’s the basic gist of these kinds of episodes.

“Y, y, you people...you scoundrels!”

Aogasaki, who’s always calm, gets teary-eyed in shame and in fury.

She’s blushing, her shoulders are trembling, and while I’m talking about it, her huge breasts are also jiggling around. Nice reaction.

She’s like those stubborn characters where in a cliched development, they become defenseless against lewd things. She seems to have realized this gap moe. Perhaps this is the wisdom of an upperclassman? *(TLN: Gap moe is when a character acts contradictory to their usual behavior and it’s seen as cute)*

However, Aogasaki, I must criticize you on one point.

Drop the bra. Japanese-style characters like you are supposed wrap themselves with a sarashi. *(TLN: [Explanation for what a sarashi is](#))*

“Peeking in on a woman changing is inexcusable! Let me mend your ways!”

“Eek! Make a run for it, Ryuga!”

Thus, the plan proceeds without a hitch, and we immediately get ready to flee. Alright. Now chase after us, Aogasaki. All while showing your lively bouncing chest!

The very moment we try to break into a sprint, something zipped right beside me and pierced into a tree ahead of us.

It was the wooden sword, Aogasaki threw it. What would you do if that had killed me, Aogasaki?

“Do you think you can escape from me?!”

An angry roar suddenly came out from behind, and the back of my neck was forcefully grabbed.

Naturally, it was Aogasaki. She rushed out from the window using her superhuman running strength, and then succeeded in grabbing me within the blink of an eye. She had also caught Ryuuga already using her other hand.

...After a few seconds, Ryuuga and I were kneeling side-by-side. This is where we were about to receive judgement.

“Now then, you people. Have any excuses?”

Aogasaki glared like a shark. For some reason, she was only glaring at me.

“...None.”

“Alright. In that case, choose your fate. Slashing, stabbing, beaten to death, or getting strangled. Which do you prefer?”

“Seduction, if possible.”

“Still speaking impudently, are you! You...per...vert...!”

Aogasaki starts to forcefully strangle my neck. I want to shoot ectoplasm out of my mouth, but unfortunately I don't have such an unusual ability.

Suddenly, a glimpse of Aogasaki's bra could be seen from her blouse. It seems that in her anger, she forgot to button up the upper-half of it.

(Not good)

I immediately averted my eyes away from her chest.

The only one who gets to directly look at a heroine/candidate's underwear is the protagonist. It's forbidden for me to look.

No matter what idea you follow, it won't work out perfectly...that's the fate of a friend character.

“Kobayashi! I suppose you lured Ryuuga into this!”

“Hey! Not true! Really!”

It’s true. However, if I don’t do this, Ryuuga won’t get a “fan service scene.”

Again, Ryuuga’s libido is low. Harem protagonists are often dense herbivores, but Ryuuga is a particularly remarkable case of this.

“Lies! There’s no way Ryuuga would propose to peep!”

“It’s the truth! Ryuuga brought it up to me! ‘We really should stop. Doing things like this isn’t good,’ is how I replied! And then he told me about it being El Dorado!

Thereupon, Ryuuga muttered “it’s actually the opposite...”

Thank you for the retort, Ryuuga. Indeed, you’re not someone that would propose to peep on another.

“Kobayashi. Any last words?”

“U, um...when I’m kneeling like this, I can probably see your panties.”

“Die!”

“I was only alerting you!”

Before the finishing blow can knock me out, I drop down. The one in the supporting role doesn’t need to suffer any more than this.

Just pretending to have fainted was my intention, but Aogasaki was being serious.

Bam, bam! Two blows strike my head, I begin to see stars, and then I lost my consciousness at that moment.

Just before that happened, my eyes met with Ryuuga’s. He glared at me with a look that had a bit of displeasure.

I suppose he’s angry that I pinned the blame on him. Or perhaps he’s angry that I saw Aogasaki’s bra.

Don’t worry. It was practically out of my field of vision. I wouldn’t make such a blunder.

So Ryuuga...stop beating me up alongside Aogasaki.

That second blow was you, wasn't it?

About an hour has passed.

When I woke up, I was in my bed at home.

It seems that Ryuuga brought me here. My head still throbs and aches, but as expected of battle experts...they skillfully avoided any vital points.

(It's good that I had told Ryuuga about the keys hidden inside the flowerpot at the garden)

As an aside, similar to the situation at Ryuuga's house, my parents both work and rarely come home.

Even so, I can't cook like Ryuuga can, mostly because I don't feel like doing it. Getting meals from the convenience store day and night is fine for me.

"Phew. I did a good job once again today."

For the time being, I got out of my bed while speaking to myself.

The value of this episode was definitely worth the effort. Despite having made a mistake back then regarding Yukimiya, the outcome of this time was superb.

(I wonder if Ryuga enjoyed himself. I thought it was pretty fun at least.)

With a foolish friend involved, the daily life part has to at least be amusing. Especially when the main storyline contains tense supernatural battles.

In that sense, the duty I'm tasked with is a heavy one. This definitely isn't something that would be entrusted to other people.

(I wonder what Ryuga's doing right about now...perhaps he's fighting peculiarities right now without the time to even do homework.)

Well, if need be, I can tutor him. I don't have much motivation when it comes to things for myself, but if it's for the sake of the leading actor, I'm confident that I can handle whatever support is needed.

...While thinking about such things, I then received a message from my cell phone.

Upon checking, it was from Ryuuga.

‘Are you awake? Cool your head down, and I mean that in two ways! Also, don’t forget to do your homework!’

As expected, he’s a protagonist I can depend on when it comes to being good with retorts.

Part 5

It was now Friday of that week.

After school, I thought that Ryuuga and I would go home together without any heroine intervention, but a minor event popped up.

Several people in the class said “Let’s all go for some karaoke!”

The one who started it was Satou. His purpose was one of the heroines/candidates, Elmira McCartney. He’s a nefarious guy that would make a move on her right in front of Ryuuga, but I suppose something like this is bound to happen for both popular people and heroines.

Elmira is a foreigner from Eastern Europe that moved in once we were in our second year of school. Furthermore, she’s a super-beauty that the boys won’t leave alone. She immediately became a favorite of the class, I even heard that she has a secret fan club right now. However, her hair is scarlet.

Naturally, she’s fluent in Japanese and it seems like she hardly experiences any culture gap. She has medium-long wavy hair, and her speech has a noble-like mannerism to it. On the other hand though, she’s very moody and has a mischievous personality. She also wears her uniform a little loose.

She’s what’s commonly referred to as a “devilish character.” Let me repeat myself, her hair is scarlet.

“You should go too, Elmira! Well, won’t it be fun?”

“I appreciate the thought, but I must decline your offer. I have some trouble breathing when I’m within a large crowd of people.”

Right from the get-go, Elmira bluntly refused Satou’s offer.

However, they were being persistent and when they eventually lost their patience, they presented her with the following condition, “If Ryuuga comes as well, how about joining us?”

...Choosing the protagonist over the people lining up for her. This is the typical attitude of a heroine. As expected for one of the three major heroines.

I'm going off on a tangent here, but the three major heroines are Yukimiya Shiori, Aogasaki Rei, and Elmira McCartney. I'm expecting one of these three to win over Ryuuga. There's also his childhood friend, but childhood friend characters don't end up as likely victors. So I'm going to exclude her.

"If Hinomori comes, it's okay, right? Alright, Hinomori, let's go for some karaoke!"

"Huh? No thanks, I'm..."

"I'm begging you! Think of it as doing an act of kindness!"

Gradually, Ryuuga warmed up to the idea of karaoke, and so I immediately raised my hand and told them I would participate as well. I can't afford to sit out on these course of events.

"Alright! Just this once, I'll let you hear the wonderful singing voice of yours truly!"

"Huh? You're coming too?"

"Obviously! If Elmira's going, then I'm going too!"

Actually, I don't really care whether or not Elmira's going. I wasn't particularly fond of karaoke either since I wanted to be as frugal as possible this month.

However, if Ryuuga is going, that's another story.

In the "school part," if Hinomori Ryuuga goes somewhere, then Kobayashi Ichirou is bound to be there as well. It's an unwritten law.

After all, I'm the protagonist's friend.

I'm the symbol of Ryuuga's daily life.

Afterwards, we all soon arrived at the karaoke center.

The group included Ryuuga, Elmira, and 15 other classmates. Ten of them were boys and the other five were girls. This was a large number of people, so we entered a wide room that was like a hall.

"Who's first to go?"

"That would be the one who proposed this, Satou! He's going to sing a love song to Elmira."

“Hey, stop entering in your songs! There’s already five, and they’re all “Last Christmas” aren’t they?”

...While everyone was getting excited over the karaoke, Ryuuga didn’t try to sing, but instead focused on sipping the tea.

Ryuuga was never someone who felt out of place within the class, but he wasn’t exactly a central figure either. He stands out because he gets involved with the heroines almost every day, but he basically doesn’t talk to any of the classmates apart from me.

That’s okay. It’s fine if I’m Ryuuga’s only close friend. If there are multiple friend characters, their duties would be split up and my screen time would diminish. Or perhaps, *she* would get jealous.

“—Ryuuga, are you not going to sing?”

Ignoring everyone that’s fooling around, Elmira starts a conversation with Ryuuga.

She’s a cunning heroine, she acutely took a seat neighboring Ryuuga. I as well acutely take Ryuuga’s other side.

“Oh, I’m fine. I’m not that good.”

“Ah, how regrettable. I wanted to hear you sing, Ryuuga.”

Perhaps Ryuuga is fine with just seeing everyone else have fun.

Such an everyday scene like this is what Ryuuga is protecting. He wants to protect it. He will not let the peculiarities cross over into this world. And I suppose he’s thinking that it’s something worth fighting for. What a cool guy. As expected of my protagonist.

Though, I am a bit worried that perhaps he’s not too good at singing.

Someday, Ryuuga might do his own character theme song. It’s common for characters to sing their own theme songs. If he’s too tone-deaf though, he’ll just get laughed at during battle.

(Perhaps it’d be good if I start taking him to karaoke as practice from now on)

While I was thinking of such things—Ryuuga suddenly stood up.

He said “I need to use the restroom for a bit” to only Elmira and me, and then left the room. Fortunately, there was nobody paying attention to it.

I immediately tried making eye contact with Elmira.

I wanted to determine whether or not she was going to follow Ryuuga.

When the protagonist switches locations, so does the center of the stage. There’s nothing of worth happening in this room. We’re not here to listen to Satou’s love song.

When thinking about it, this is Elmira we’re talking about. If he actually went to the restroom, she wouldn’t be able to enter with him. So with that being the case, perhaps I would be of more use.

Do I go? Do you go? Who’s it gonna be? I used my eyes to communicate as such, but Elmira only made a puzzled expression. Yukimiya was also like this, but why are you bad at making inferences as well?

“What is it, Kobayashi Ichirou? You’re staring.”

“Ah, it’s nothing.”

“Is there something strange about me?”

Your hair’s red.

“sigh...since it’s come to this, you should decline doing karaoke. With them being so absorbed in their own tomfoolery, I think that they’re just sucking off of Ryuuga’s blood at this point.”

I have a hunch that what I heard next was something I wasn’t supposed to hear.

“If we’re talking about Ryuuga, then rather than leeching off of other people’s blood, I’d prefer that I suck off of his blood..at this pace, I won’t be able to gain any powe—”

“I, I need to use the restroom as well!”

Interrupting Elmira, who had let her true identity slip in her rambling, I withdrew from the room as fast as I could. Holy crap woman, you just revealed yourself! I know when to step out of the ring! I’m just a mere friend character!

Elmira might be a dangerous person for me. When being near her, there's the risk of me stumbling upon classified information.

...It's fine. I heard nothing.

She's not a vampire or anything like that, I wouldn't even think so in my wildest dreams.

Ryuuga didn't go to the restroom.

Taking a seat on a sofa in front of the lobby, he was trying to take a breather. Perhaps he's not too fond of tomfoolery like what was going on back there.

"Hey Ryuuga, what's wrong?"

I sit next to him and hand him a wet towel that I brought along from the room.

Ryuuga wiped his cheeks and forehead, then a little while later, began to talk as if he was monologuing.

"Since I don't usually socialize with large groups...I can't keep my composure."

"Well, that's because you're always with me. It's just you and I that hang out together."

"That's what I'm comfortable with after all. I feel most relieved when I'm with you, Ichirou."

"Wah ha ha. I see, I see."

I just received a comment that would be long-desired for friend character, I feel like dancing around in joy. However, at the same time, I also feel some regret.

This is probably where Elmira would have arrived. She would sneak out of the bustling karaoke room and then there would be an isolated meeting between the protagonist and heroine...that's probably how the situation was supposed to go.

Undoubtedly, Ryuuga, having spent all his time fighting, wouldn't know how to handle a difficult situation like this one.

And then Elmira...being a non-human vampire, would be fated to not have a

normal life, just like him. I'm sure of that.

The two would mutually sympathize with each other, and then their bonds would deepen—that would be the most optimal development.

However, there's no use having that happen now that I'm the one here.

A friend character is a friend character, and they have their duties. I was thinking that someday, I would have to do what I'm about to do, but didn't decide upon it until now.

This is a good chance. I can accomplish it with this opportunity. I'll try to carry out this indispensable, yet cliched development as a close friend.

"Hey, Ryuga."

"Yeah?"

"There's something that I've been meaning to ask you."

"What is it?"

"Are you—hiding something from me?"

In that moment, Ryuuga's complexion changed.

There are some dangers involved in asking this earth-shattering question, but I'm more than aware of that. A "foolish pervert" friend character has to show a sharp side to them sometimes.

"Well, um."

Ryuuga was hesitant in replying. He's undoubtedly thinking "If I tell the truth, Ichirou might get dragged into the battle."

Of course, I too would be troubled in giving an honest reply.

Dodge the question, Ryuuga. Feign ignorance, Ryuuga. You don't need to consult anyone other than a heroine.

"Ichirou, look."

Ryuuga starts to say something.

Then suddenly, an employee at the front collapsed.

"I"

Ryuuga and I get up at once. When we head over to check on her condition, we notice something else that was odd.

...It wasn't just the employee. The visitors in the aisle also collapsed. The faint noises of singing in each room also suddenly ceased.

In a panic, I looked into the door of the nearest karaoke room.

Sure enough, there was a couple slouching down on the floor. It was the same as with the employees.

"W, what is this..."

"It's a powerful hypnotic wave that made everyone fall unconscious."

Ryuuga made an immediate reply to my mutters. Quickly understanding the situation, he promptly put the victims into a comfortable position. It seems he's experienced at this.

...Could it, by any chance, be *that*?

Did we break into the battle part?

Was this what the karaoke event was turning into? Is this the episode where "the opponent's influence seeps into the protagonists gentle daily life"!?

I predicted that an event like this would happen someday. However, now that it's come to this, my face has stiffened from the tension.

I'm supposed to be away during the battle parts. For example I would "feel the urge to take the cat that's always in my house to the vet."

The daily life part was my home, but now that I'm here, I'm not sure how to make my way through.

(Don't get flustered, Kobayashi Ichirou! You've got to do it!)

Right. I have no choice but to do it. As a friend character, I have no choice but to act flustered with all of my might.

That's how the setting goes, that's my duty. And then Ryuuga is supposed to do something!

"W-w-w-what do we do, Ryuga! S-s-should we call the police?!"

“Calm down, Ichirou. It’ll be alright, the victims aren’t in danger.”

With an expression completely befitting of a protagonist, Ryuuga attentively became alert of his surroundings.

This is the first time I’ve seen Ryuuga in battle mode so close...this is bad. He’s so cool. I might fall in love with him.

“Also, this isn’t a situation that can be dealt with by the police. To help everyone—we have to beat down the perpetrator emitting the hypnotic wave.”

“P, perpetrator? You mean...”

As Ryuuga and I were having such a conversation, Elmira came running by.

“Ryuuga! Everyone in the room fainted!”

It seems she wasn’t the one who sent out the hypnotic wave. As expected of Ryuuga’s companion character. As expected of a vampi**.

“Ryuuga. Did you notice it? The culprit behind the hypnotic wave is the shop manager.”

“...So it was him after all. I wanted to double-check it, so I came to the front desk.”

“Even I thought that the man had a strange air to him. It seems that he’s an ‘apostle.’”

Apostles. It seems those are the opponents that Ryuuga and the others are fighting.

From their name alone, it seems that they’re worshipers of an evil god, a demon, or a god of destruction. I feel that it’s a little cliché, but Ryuuga himself is a cliché protagonist so it works.

Elmira points to an emergency staircase and urges Ryuuga.

“The shop manager fled to the rooftop. We need to chase after him, Ryuuga.”

“Ah, Ichirou. Sorry, but I’m entrusting everyone to you!”

Ryuuga said so while running off with Elmira, and I replied back with “Huh? Hey, wait! Where are you going!”

Truthfully, I had guessed that he would request this of me. This is also a cliched development within the realm of cliched developments.

At the scene of the incident, the friend character is entrusted with looking after the victims. Sometimes they're told "Escape with everyone else!" This is expected when a battle happens.

To be frank, I think this is an unreasonable request at best. I'm only a high school student, what do you want me to do in this situation? Furthermore, the cause of the fainting is the supernatural power of an apostle.

Whatever, there's no use complaining. Since the protagonist asked me of this, I can only do my best.

(When Ryuga kills the enemy, everyone should wake up. For the time being, perhaps I should move them from the floor to the sofas)

I turned to face to interior of the building and placed everyone that fainted on a sofa.

Thankfully, there weren't many staff or guests, so I finished in about twenty minutes. Also, the genuine store manager had collapsed in his personal restroom.

I can only wait for Ryuuga and Elmira to come back now...I don't know when that'll happen, so I decided to return to the karaoke room for now.

About ten minutes have passed. I'm singing "Last Christmas" for the third time now.

Then Ryuuga and Elmira finally came back.

At the same moment, the fainted classmates are waking up one by one now. It seems they managed to safely beat the apostle.

"Hey Ryuga, where did you go! I was worried, you know?"

"Ah, my bad...I was checking the other rooms..."

Ryuuga's complexion is frighteningly bad. His manner of walking was a bit unsteady. Was it that much of a hard fight?

No, on the contrary, Elmira is looking bright. Rather than being exhausted,

she's more lively than before the fight. Something must have happened.

"Heh heh, thank you for the meal, Ryuuga."

...Oh, she sucked his blood.

No wait, I don't know about her sucking anything. I don't know anything at all.

"Ryuuga's blood was a delicacy after all. It's like a rich wine...I could get addicted to this."

Elmira McCartney. What kind of person is she?

She's a something-something-pire.

Part 6

After that one case at the karaoke center, I've had a slight change in my awareness.

It was a desire to see "battle scenes of Ryuuga and the others."

Perhaps it might be better to know the abilities and storyline of Ryuuga and the heroines? That was what I was thinking about.

(I got a bit flustered when Elmira was about to reveal herself, but it shouldn't be a hindrance to the story if it's just me that secretly knows.)

If gather various information, I won't carelessly get tangled up with the main story anymore. Using that knowledge, I can preemptively avoid getting deeply involved.

Besides, sometimes the daily life part is closely intertwined with the battle part.

If I know what enemies he's fighting against, I can also disguise my hints for how to beat them as senseless ramblings. By knowing the affairs of the main story, more effective conduct is possible.

Even as a minor character, if I can know the entire script, I can deal with whatever drama ensues.

I'm satisfied with my current position, but I shouldn't lose my ambition.

Kobayashi Ichirou is a friend character—but he should also gradually be progressing.

For that reason, I'm often spectating battles from the shadows now.

My aim is the pattern of when Ryuuga slips out of the classroom.

I can't do much about fights outside of the school or ones that suddenly pop up in the middle of the night, so I gave up on those. Well, it would be too risky to peep every single time.

(It seems that Ryuuga's companion characters are only the three major heroines.)

There are cases similar to the one at the karaoke center the other day, but Ryuuga and the others basically take on battles as a party of four.

They are Hinomori Ryuuga, Yukimiya Shiori, Aogasaki Rei, and Elmira McCartney.

Likewise, the three are the ones closest to the position of the main heroine. Ryuuga is a herbivore, so it might be hard, but I wish them all the best of luck. As long as things don't cause the parental rating to change.

“Gugaaaaaaah!”

At a riverbank during the evening, a peculiarity that looks a lot like bear roared.

With a great speed that was unbecoming for its large build, it energetically rushed forward towards the four high school students in the way. However, something happened once the distance reached a few meters.

ring ring ring

The sound of a bell echoed within the unpopulated riverbed.

“East wind melts the ice, bush warblers singing, fish emerge from the ice.”

Then there was a woman's dignified chanting, and the peculiarities movements evidently became slow. Trying to force its way through, its arms and legs looked like they were in slow-motion.

“Rain moistens the soil, mist starts to linger, grass sprouts and trees bud... Now's the time, everyone! If you get injured, don't push yourself and come back to me!”

—Yukimiya Shiori. “The Shrine Maiden of Life.”

She's what's known as a healer. She can heal the wounds of herself and others when she touches them with her hands.

Due to her special qualities, her role during battle is exclusively for support. Her dedicated item is a “Kagura Suzu” and when she rings it, she can weaken an apostle's movements (*TLN: A Kagura suzu is basically a set of bells attached to a stick, and is used for Shinto rituals*)

(That incantation seems to be about the 72 microseasons of the year when Googling it.)

[TLN: All of those phrases Yukimiya chanted corresponded to one of the microseasons]

In a flash, one shadow rushed towards the peculiarity, whose movements were sealed.

“Victory!”

Like a flash of lightning, a wooden sword sliced at the peculiarities’ left side.

Its sharp claw danced in the air with trails of blood, then tumbled onto the ground. Soon after that, it melted and then eventually evaporated.

“Gugyaaaaa!”

“Did you think this was just a wooden sword? Nothing is impenetrable when I strengthen the blade with my ability!”

—Aogasaki Rei. “The Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance.”

She can clad her sword blade in a void and cut through anything.

She swings her dedicated item, the “Blade of the Sacred Tree.” She’s a genuine battle member that takes the initiative to rush towards the enemy. If going by pure fighting strength, she’s second only to Ryuuga.

(Come to think of it, back when I was peeping on her, Aogasaki threw that wooden sword and it pierced a tree...so even though it’s made from a sacred tree, its strength is unimaginable. What was she thinking when she was throwing it?)

Aogasaki turns around as if she’s dancing, and instantly unleashed a second attack.

The peculiarity hardened its fur, then began randomly firing needles of them.

“Gwa ha ha! Fool! Let’s see if you can avoid these at this rang—”

Something happened before the peculiarity could finish its surprisingly fluent speech.

The countless fur strands it shot out all burst into flames at once. A swarm of

will-o'-the-wisps flew in and turned the strands entirely into ashes.

“I’m here as well, bear-like apostle.”

—Elmira McCartney. “The Blood-kin of Eternal Darkness.”

I’ve already tired myself out by saying this, but she’s a vampire. She’s a mid-range attack type and can control blood as she pleases, such as converting it into flames.

Even her own blood can work as an energy source, but it’s more efficient for her to get her supply by bloodsucking. That’s why she asks for blood. She seems to find Ryuuga’s blood especially delicious.

(She at first regarded Ryuuga, who had the ‘dragon king’ dwelling within him, as dangerous and infiltrated the school to eliminate him. But after that, she reconciled with him and became a companion. She’s established as a devilish character that tries to suck Ryuuga’s blood whenever the chance arises, or something like that...she incessantly talks far too much as if nobody is listening)

Before long, the flames ignited the enemy’s body, turning the peculiarity into a burning daruma. (*TLN: So a daruma is a type of doll and there’s this ceremony where they get burned at around New Years*)

“Gya, Gyaaaaaa!”

Trying to withstand it, the brown bear-like apostle heads towards the river with its slowed down speed. It seems that it wants to jump into the water to extinguish the fire.

Seeing that, the three heroines promptly shouted.

“I leave this to you, Hinomori!”

“Get going, Ryuuga!”

“Do settle this splendidly, Ryuuga.”

Not needing to wait for their cues, the star performer had already broken into a sprint.

He ran at a speed the eyes can’t even keep up with, then leaped unbelievably high. His body was wrapped in a gold aura, taking into the form of dragon from

his back like what I saw the other day.

“Unleashing divine might—’Dragon King,’ become one with me and slaughter our opponent!”

In the next moment, a golden comet dropped down from above the peculiarity’s head.

A roaring explosion. The atmosphere trembled. What’s more, the cloud above its head whirled in circles. It was a powerful effect.

(Ooh...its still amazing no matter how often I’ve seen it)

—At last, there’s Hinomori Ryuuga. “The Successor of the Dragon King.”



To describe it in a few words, this guy can do just about everything.

He can produce flames, clad something in void, and can do some healing as well. He's unparalleled to the point that it would make someone go "Wouldn't you be fine by yourself?"

Of particular note is that he can turn bombard something with bullets of light that he formed...nicknamed "Dragon Fang (that's what I'm calling it)." It has a bit of an overwhelming power and is a move that can finish things in one attack.

However, according to my investigations, Ryuuga has not yet mastered the complete power of the "Dragon King." So during that incident before, it seemed like was actually going to get swallowed up by that power. Even so, he's still plenty strong.

"Thank you, Hinomori."

"Today you were able to unleash it for six minutes. You're able to control it well, Ryuuga."

"I was able to buy some time for him..."

The heroines rush up to Ryuuga, whose aura now dispersed, and surround him.

Ryuuga made a refreshing smile and said "Thank you, everyone."

"Ah, Hinomori, there's blood on the back of your hand...let me heal you at once."

"Wait, Shiori. Don't use your powers for a cut of this level. Let me take a look, Ryuuga. I'll wrap it with a bandage."

"Wait right there. Let me get a taste."

It's right after the battle, and they're already being merry and flirting around with Ryuuga.

...Aside from that, the brown bear-like apostle has disappeared without a trace.

Just like the apostle he defeated in the parking lot, it could no longer retain its solid form. Six minutes kind of feels of overkill.

(All the same, Ryuuga is really cool.)

He's a splendid protagonist who never backs down no matter what. Next time when I meet him in the classroom, I'll I think I'll use honorifics. As long as he's here, this world will be safe.

Fight on, Ryuuga. Don't lose, Ryuuga.

Please protect our world full of hope. Along with your three servants.

The results of spectating the battle parts were considerably big.

I've identified the general abilities of the main characters. I also know a rough concept of the enemy.

They are "Apostles of Hell," inhabitants of the spirit world.

A couple hundred years ago, a door to this world opened, and they began their invasion, but they lost and the door was sealed. However, there's recently been a warp in the space-time within this town, and a number of apostles once again started invading.

Beast-like things, fish-like things, bug-like things, they came in various forms. It seems they can also take the form of a human body.

The "Apostles of Hell" are planning to revive their fallen king, the "Evil Spirit."

In other words, this "Evil Spirit" is the final boss of this story.

Thinking about it, it's very likely that the revival of the "Evil Spirit" is the final stage in the story. Then I suppose that the town, the school, and even my house will sequentially get destroyed.

My father will probably weep over the lawn he's tended to for tens of years, but I hope he will be able to endure it.

In this world, nothing takes priority over Ryuuga's circumstances.

(It's likely that the one who saved the world hundreds of years ago was Ryuuga's ancestor. Perhaps the heroines' ancestors were there as well.)

The "Dragon King" within Ryuuga is a guardian deity that has been handed down for generations in the Hinomori household. That's what I heard based on my eavesdropping.

In other words, Ryuuga was "special" since the point of his birth.

Furthermore, the apostles made a return precisely when he inherited the “Dragon King,” so it can be said “the Hinomori household is notably special.”

The protagonist’s power is really something. After all, it’s what Ryuuga holds.

...As an aside, if the final boss destroys my home, we’ll have to renovate it. It seems that our Kobayashi household will have to inherit loans for generations.

In order to not cause such a disaster, I have to do my best to support Ryuuga.

Anyways, this is the general overview of what I’ve found.

There are still many unclear things, but I think I’ll temporarily halt my investigation here.

In the end, Ryuuga, the heroines, and the opponents are all battle pros. Me not being aware of this up until now is close to a miracle. Thinking about it, I’ve been crossing a very dangerous bridge.

(With this information, I can prevent making another blunder from now on. Starting from tomorrow, I’ll devote myself to being the carefree perverted friend once again.)

However...something happened as I was about to finish up my investigation one day.

I went and made a blunder.

And what I mean by that is I completely messed up.

—My peeping of the battles was revealed to Ryuuga and the others.

Chapter 2

Part 1

On that day, the battlefield for Ryuuga and the others was an unpopulated park.

The third apostle they were fighting was an octopus-like enemy that was huge like a blimp. It was impressive how it was able to catch Yukimiya using its tentacle-like arms, but it didn't have the time do anything erotic since Ryuuga beat it down.

(Whoa! How cool, Ryuuga! But, wouldn't it have been better to observe the situation a little longer? To an extent, Yukimiya was the highlight scene of the fight...)

Then something arose as I was thinking of such things.

I may have let my guard down. My wariness might have been inactive. In any case, I was ten meters from the battle scene, which was too close.

I was hiding myself behind a sculpture of a stone animal. These things were common in parks, and some of them were painted with a weird color. I was hiding by a panda that had an odd yellow coloring for some reason.

That was a wrong move.

The school uniform I wore was too different of a color compared to the yellow panda.

After making sure of the apostle's disappearance, Ryuuga suddenly turned around, and at that moment—

Ryuuga's line of sight completely met with mine.

"Ah."

"Ah."

Our voices overlapped and they both stiff.

Feigning ignorance would be impossible. My eyes were still interlocked with Ryuuga's. I would have definitely seen the third enemy that disappeared as well.

"I, Ichirou...?"

Ryuuga called out my name, and I resigned myself.

I timidly get up and make an appearance from the panda. I heard the heroines slightly gasp upon seeing me.

"K, Kobayashi?"

"Kobayashi, you..."

"Don't tell me you saw that? Kobayashi Ichirou."

They spoke one after the other, and I shrunk away like an elementary school kid that did that something bad.

...This turned terrible.

The friend position that I took great pains to establish until today collapsed.

Curse my carelessness. Why wasn't I being more cautious?! Why didn't I stop spectating after the previous fight?! Why is this panda painted yellow?!

The four approached me. The people with unusual abilities were surrounding one powerless person, I could only laugh at this kind of situation.

While I was dumbfounded and frozen stiff, Ryuuga's confused voice soon reached my ears.

"Ichirou, how long you were you there..."

Should I speak honestly?

I've been watching battles from start to finish recently. I've also been taking notes.

No, it's a poor move. If I do confess, I'll seem like a mysterious person. Or rather, it'll seem like I'm with the enemy or something like that.

This is a completely different matter compared to peeping on Aogasaki changing clothes. This is something that's I'm never meant to be exposed on.

This is something even worse than looking at a heroine's bra.

(I need to decide on what to do.)

While being stuck on what course of action to go through with, I come up with something in the end.

Doing this is the worst, and there's the risk that the position I've held so far will change. However, I can't escape this situation without some sacrifice. I want to be Ryuuga's friend character. So, I have no choice!

"—Ryuga."

In the next moment, I changed my expression and drew closer to Ryuuga.

"Hey Ryuuga! What was that just now!"

"Huh...?"

"I happened to come here by chance, how are you fighting monsters! How is your whole body shining in gold!"

"T, that, um..."

"When I was on the way home, the park was noisy so I happened to come here. What was that monster just now!"

I mixed some fierce questions in with my overbearing explanation.

I'm not going to let Ryuuga keep up with my pace. At any rate, I need to convey my stance on this.

"Ah! I get it! Are you filming a movie or something? So there was a mechanism to make that monster disappear, right? Wow, modern technology is unbelievable."

"....."

"I see, you four are part of the actors. That's why you're all awfully close even during school. So that's what it was."

This is a pretty forced explanation, I'm fully aware of that. But nothing else came to mind.

(The best case scenario is if they buy it. They should know that I'm a carefree

person!)

Please. For goodness sake. Go along with my wave of deception.

I'm doing the best I can in the daily life part! That's the only position that I'm suited for! I can't be like Satou!

"Hinomori, what do we do..."

As if troubled, Yukimiya asked for Ryuuga's opinion.

"I'll entrust this to Ryuuga's wishes. It's up to you whether or not you speak."

Aogasaki seems to want to leave it to Ryuuga.

"I don't mind either way. I never planned to hide this from the beginning."

Elmira is fiddling with her (scarlet) hair while saying so. She's definitely a dangerous character.

...These courses of events are kinda problematic, but there's still Ryuuga's thoughts on the matter.

We observe him as I hold my breath. Soon, Ryuuga breathes in deeply and stares straight at me.

"—We need to talk, Ichirou. It's about the truth."

We don't need to talk!

"I'm doing this since you're my dear friend, Ichirou. Everyone, I hope you're okay with that."

Everyone, disagree with him! Make your complaints!

"I see. I too am indebted to Kobayashi..."

Yukimiya! Don't return my favor with a stab in the back! Besides, all I did was tell you a little bit about Ryuuga!

"Is that so. Since he's seen the apostles, there's a chance that Kobayashi will fall into danger as well. I might be better to have him know our circumstances."

Aogasaki! You have no right to say that when you nearly killed me! I already know about your circumstances!

"Anyways, I just want to go home quickly."

Vampire! You can just shut up!

“...Everyone, thank you!”

Hearing the heroines' opinions, Ryuuga smiled.

Not good. It seems they've already made up their mind.

“I hope it's okay that you all entrust Ichirou to me. Well then Ichirou, do you have some time? There's something I want to talk about.”

Afterwards, the heroines parted ways.

Ryuuga explained various facts to me.

—The truth is that we hold unusual abilities.

—With our power, we fight mankind's enemy, the “Apostles of Hell.”

—The guardian deity called the “Dragon King” has been passed down in my household for generations.

—Those three are companions that I'm fighting alongside with...

The secrets Ryuuga talked about were pretty much things I already knew.

That being said, I can't just tell him “I already know,” so I was forced to make astonished, perplexed, and enthusiastic reactions.

“Perhaps it's for the better that I was able to talk with you. I felt painfully guilty the entire time I was keeping this a secret from you.”

At the end, I saw Ryuuga saying that while having a carefree laugh, and so I gave up. From the start, this was just me reaping what I sow. Ryuuga didn't do anything wrong.

...With this, I'll have retire being a “carefree friend character that doesn't know anything.”

Starting today, I'll have to change into a “cooperating friend character that knows the secret about Ryuuga and the others.”

It'll be fine. With this, I'll still be a friend character.

I guess saying “I'm worried about Ryuuga and the others” or “I'm bitter that I have no power” has been added to my duties now.

I suppose I should be glad that it only ended with a minor change. I might have increased my involvement with the main story, but I don't think Ryuuga and the others would force me to do anything absurd as a student who holds no unusual abilities.

From now on, I think I'll refrain from doing any excessive conduct.

Screw off, status promotion.

Part 2

Since I knew about the circumstances of Ryuuga and the others, my position slightly changed starting from the next day.

Though I say that, my foolish talk and my reports on the data of the girls is the same as before. It's just that I have to add "worries about Ryuuga and the others" as well.

"All things considered...I still can't believe it. Ryuuga and the others are people that use unusual abilities."

It was currently the break between classes. After doing my usual indecent talk, I threw in that phrase as well.

I don't want to mention these things if I can, but it would be especially unnatural to avoid the topic of the "unique individuals." Because of that, I was planning on just lightly touching on the subject when the bell rings so that the mood doesn't turn serious.

Of course, I didn't neglect to be alert of my surroundings so that nobody can hear us.

I also lower my tone of voice. I make sure not to use up a large amount of air when speaking.

"You were doing a lot of difficult things in the shadows. I wasn't aware of it at all."

"It's difficult, but this is my duty...I also have reliable companions, so no need to worry."

"Hey Ryuga, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Your sentiments are enough. The "Apostles of Hell" are opponents that are no match for ordinary humans. If an apostle appears, don't hesitate to run away."

He ended it with that. Ryuuga was sitting in his usual seat while having a promising smile. For some reason, whenever the seating arrangement changes,

he's always still in that spot.

This guy really is a protagonist.

I understand each position well. I'm being careful not to pull myself out of the main story too unnaturally.

(Now I have to worry about being worried. Ugh, I really made a big blunder, didn't I.)

...Turning my line of sight, I saw Elmira soundly sleeping in a distant seat.

Her deep crimson hair is vibrant today as well. For a moment, I thought that the desk was on fire.

"By the way, Ichirou."

Leaving aside Elmira, I brought my attention back to Ryuuga, whose expression suddenly darkened.

"There's still...something I'm hiding from you, Ichirou."

"Is this thing you're hiding something you can't talk about? If so, I probably shouldn't hear about it."

"....."

"No matter how carefree I am, I understand the weight of what you're carrying. You don't need to talk about it until you want to."

"...Ah. Thank you, Ichirou."

I'd be an idiot to say "Why are you so distant! Tell me! Spit it out!" Since Ryuuga is drawing a line, I'll gladly comply with him.

There's no way I'm going to intervene with the story any more than I already did. I've already learned my lesson. I just barely kept my position as a friend character, I don't want to let it go to waste.

This position is my life's calling. I'm attached to it.

I don't want to stand out, but even if some guy like me was added to the cast of main characters, I would have no merit to the story.

I wouldn't even appear in the "character introduction column."

Afterwards, the days continued peacefully (for me) during the week, and I had gotten accustomed to my current role as well.

I actually came to think “it seems things went okay in the end, right?”

Of course, I didn’t spectate battles anymore. However, that doesn’t mean I don’t know about the course of events in the main story.

That’s because I’m in a position to open ask Ryuuga about “today’s progress” now.

“Ryuga, how have you been? Any dangerous apostles show up?”

“I’m alright. The enemies are gradually getting stronger, but I won’t lose.”

“What happened to the previous incident with ‘the souls of women getting captured?’”

“Oh, that wasn’t a demon, but an apostle. I defeated it three days ago. I had to ask Shiori and Rei to be decoys.”

“Did some flirting go on after that? The heroines all kinda get jealous, were they trying to compete for you?”

“Huh? No, but...heroines?”

Just like that, I can easily hear about each episode. He can simply tell me about what I missed out on in the series.

(I wonder if I’ll happen to be present in a battle part again one day.)

Of course, Ryuuga is not a guy that would let me dragged into a battle before his own eyes. However, cases where “an apostle appears accidentally,” like that time at the karaoke center, could be considered.

What should I do when things like that happen? Is it fine to just get flustered again? As a friend character that knows about their circumstances now, is it fine to just take care of the victims?

Something an ordinary person can do to not participate in the battles but not be a hindrance either. I may need to search for a solution to this.

For example—what about being live commentator?

I could say some flavorful things like “W, what’s with that opponent! I thought

it was translucent for a moment, but Ryuuga's attack went through!"

Or something like "Wow! Ryuuga clad his whole body in flames while also cladding it in void, and now he's leaping high into the sky?!"

Or "D, do you know the ability of that apostle, Elmira?! That apostle's ability is..."

(No, that won't work. If I held such a position, then I would have to be present at the battles everyday. I shouldn't intrude like that.)

I should be persistent in staying within the daily life part.

Now that I have this position, there must be something I can do that was impossible beforehand. I'll place my efforts in whatever that is.

For example—perhaps there would be an episode where Ryuuga loses his spirit and I would have to give him encouragement.

I could say some flavorful things like "You idiot! What are you being like this for!"

Or something like "This world is hanging on your shoulders, Ryuuga! You are the hopes of humanity, no actually, the hopes of all things alive and living!"

Or "I want to fight alongside with you! But that's impossible. I'm powerless... damn it...damn it all...Ryuuga, don't let Elmira's death be all for naught!"

Hmm. This is a pretty appealing role. My popularity would also soar.

There'd be people going "Kobayashi has been passionate lately," "He's a little pumped up," or "I wonder if Kobayashi is getting more screen time." It'd be just what I need for my character ranking.

Moving away from my delusions, Elmira is sleeping soundly at her desk, as usual.

Like Ryuuga had told me, she seems to be weak in the morning. Not because she's a vampire, but because she has a low blood pressure.

Sleep peacefully, Elmira.

Don't take a photo of her sleeping face, Satou.

However, the opportunity to encourage Ryuuga never arrived no matter how

long I waited.

It's seems he's been defeating the "Apostles of Hell" without problems. Even when the heroines get into a bit of a hard struggle, things generally turn out alright when Ryuuga makes a move.

"H, hey Ryuga. Did you meet a dangerous apostle? Did you lose your spirit?"

"Oh, things are going well."

"Are you getting tired out from fighting, both in mind and in body? Do you curse your own fate?"

"It's fine, it's fine. Thanks for your concern."

"Was Elmira killed in battle?"

"Elle is sleeping at her desk." *(TLN: Ryuuga shortened her name in this sentence. I guess that's her nickname)*

...I knew this already, but Ryuuga really is *that* kind of person. The so-called "overpowered" protagonist.

I won't say that that's bad, but if the protagonist is one-sidedly unparalleled, the excitement of the battles takes a toll. I'd like it if the "Apostles of Hell" put in more effort.

"Anyways Ichirou, even though you know my true nature, I'd like you to interact with me in the same way as always. Truthfully, I've been thinking... about if we should keep some distance."

"Don't be like that. No matter what happens, I'm your buddy. A friend of Ryuuga."

Those feelings aren't a lie. Even though I had just told the "Apostles of Hell" to try harder.

However, Ryuuga's expression didn't clear up after I said my words. He stared at his desk with a complicated expression while muttering "A friend no matter what, was it?"

Perhaps Ryuuga still has some kind of surprising setting that's beyond my imagination.

However, I dare not to know about it.

My duty is to make Ryuuga happy during the daily life parts. Aside from the moments where I have to act worried, I basically behave in a humorous and comical way.

Sooner or later, Ryuuga will face a huge crisis when the “Evil Spirit” revives. Perhaps even a new heroine will make an entry.

Day by day, I’ll support the protagonist, full with his ups and downs, in a well-behaved, cheerful, and safe manner from the daily life side. I’m not going to make a second blunder.

“Ough, guh...!”

Ryuuga suddenly clutched his chest and groaned in pain. It was the “Dragon King.”

In the past, I just acted carefree about it, but I can’t do that now. I now have the qualifications to go with the normal reaction, being seriously worried.

“H, hey Ryuga! Are you alright!”

“Agh...simmer down, you little...!”

“You hear that? Simmer down, “Dragon King!” Don’t bother Ryuga!”

I’m pretty sure my complaints didn’t have influence, but the “Dragon King” soon stopped running wild.

Ryuuga’s dripping with sweat while exhausted. This spasm(?) occurs at intervals of about one week. From now on, I need to keep memos of which days of the week and which hour they happen on.

(However, as usual, the heroines don’t come rushing to him...even though Elmira’s just a short distance away right now.)

Staring at Elmira with dissatisfaction, she really was sound asleep. She’s wearing an eye mask and there’s drool coming out of her mouth.

You, are you trying to make light of what it takes to be a heroine?

Part 3

A few days had passed by. There's one concern that's been on my mind.

For some reason—Ryuuga's been a bit cold towards me.

His attitude didn't change that much from before. However, he doesn't make eye contact with me even when we're talking, during break times he vanishes off into someplace, and the amount of times we walk home together has decreased. When I try to tell him about the three sizes of the girls, he refuses by saying "Enough of that."

(Ryuuga, what the heck happened? Haven't you been keeping your distance from me?)

...Don't tell me he's already chosen a heroine? Perhaps he's been going out with her?

No, that would be fine by me.

What I should be worried about is the possibility that "another friend character" appeared.

If true, then that would be a matter of life and death for me. If that fellow is more interesting than me, more thoughtful than me, and even thoroughly researches the three sizes of girls to the point that they also investigate the color of their panties...then even just thinking about it would make me shiver in fear. My knees would tremble.

(There's no way that can be right! Can there even be two perverts?)

When I had asked him about it, Ryuuga replied with "There's no friend closer to me than you, Ichirou." Whew, that's a relief...no such pervert exists.

With that being the case, there's only one thing I can think of as the cause.

I suppose it has to do with when Ryuuga had previously said "There's still something I'm hiding from you, Ichirou."

If that's the reason, then there's nothing I can do. It would be unwise to investigate the matter or do anything of that sort."

Ryuuga's probably hiding that secret from even the heroines. Having me know about it before they do is very problematic. No matter how close of a friend I am, I should understand my position as a sub-character.

(That being said, it's pretty lonely being without Ryuuga...)

Today, Ryuuga disappeared without waiting for 2nd period to end. He left his bag, but there were no signs that was he was going to return to the classroom at all.

Elmira is still in the classroom. It also doesn't seem like Yukimiya or Aogasaki are with him.

That being the case, perhaps this is an episode where Ryuuga goes solo. Or perhaps he's meeting with a different character.

(Perhaps—a new heroine has made an entry?)

It's possible. The battle scenes are getting plain, so perhaps she's there to spruce things up.

It wouldn't be unusual for another fighter to join at around this time. Furthermore, such a person would probably be given preferential treatment in the beginning. The "spotlight for her debut" or something like that.

She'd have a big part in the battles and would also inevitably get tangled up with the protagonist even during times of peace. Depending on how things go, it's possible that she could leap forward into the position of the heroine that's most likely to win.

New characters have an advantage. They leave an impact. Even that new heroine could get outdone by a newer one later down the line...

Hey, Elmira. This isn't the time to be sleeping. Your position, along with Yukimiya's and Aogasaki's position, is about to face its greatest crisis.

(A shrine maiden, a swordswoman, a vampire, what's next? To balance the current party of four...perhaps an underclassman character?)

As a friend of the protagonist, I have to predict every possible element and make preparations accordingly. At any rate, since I'm now established as a person that knows about the circumstances of Ryuuga and the others...the

likelihood that I'll get involved with the new heroine is pretty high.

So I decided to slip out of the classroom before 3rd period began, go somewhere to calm down, and continue thinking about measures to take. After all, there's no point in being in the classroom when Ryuuga isn't there.

This is far more important than classwork.

For the time being, I decided to feign a headache and head to the school infirmary.

It's quiet over there, so I can lie down and think. I've been there several times before and the school nurse is always absent. It's a good place to skip class work.

(When it's lunch break, I'll return to the classroom. Perhaps Ryuuga will be back by then.)

I headed towards the school infirmary, and sure enough, the nurse wasn't there. The homeroom teacher, Minegishi, should follow this person's example when it comes to motivation.

...Things are fine up until that point, but a particular problem has appeared.

Unfortunately, someone's already there.

The school infirmary has two beds. Someone was already using one of them.

(Darn, did someone have the same idea as me?)

Since the curtains surrounding the bed were closed, I'm not sure who's inside.

Since I can hear the faint sounds of someone sleeping, they're probably napping right now. Perhaps they might actually be ill right now.

(It would be bad to wake them up, so I'll be quiet.)

I approached the other bed as quietly as possible, took off my shoes, then lied down onto the bed.

The other bed isn't even a meter away. I have to be careful not to make any noise. Though, I'm just going to be thinking about "the movements and measures concerning the new heroine," so it should be fine.

(Well, even though I'm talking about new heroine, I might just be needlessly

worrying. There's the possibility that Ryuuga's going through a training event in order to control the "Dragon King".)

While I staring at the ceiling and thinking of such things, I heard the noisy bustling of students coming from the distance in the school grounds.

It's definitely from my home room class, but was 3rd period PE? I forgot my gym clothes today, so skipping class worked out pretty well.

(Come to think of it, Ryuuga always skips out on PE, doesn't he...oh right, I should close the curtains as well.)

Thinking about doing it, I sat upright.

...Then, I noticed a slight gap in the curtains of the neighboring bed.

"!"

There, I caught a glimpse of a schoolgirl's chest.

It looked soft, but also elastic, they were a pair of hills with a good form.

Unable to sleep well, it seemed that the buttons on her upper-half were undone, similar to what Aogasaki was like that one day. Since her blouse was big, her cleavage was visible. Judging by the skin tone, perhaps she's in the sports club.

(O, oh...)

It seems she's taken off her bra, this sight is pretty risque. However, the gap in the curtains is only a few centimeters, so no matter what angle I try to view through, I can't see her face.

(Not good, I can't see...it would be super wonderful if those breasts belonged to a youthful face.)

I realized that I was kneeling on top of my bed.

Despite thinking that I shouldn't look, I had entered a posture that was better for staring.

Honestly speaking, I don't like "women" that much. However, I do like a "woman's body" very much. That's to be expected though since I'm a high school boy going through puberty. Who can blame me?

For a bit, I was paying close attention to her cleavage, and then she made a slight groan.

“U.....n”

It was a bit erotic, and my heart gradually began to beat faster. It just kept rising. Who can blame me?

It looks like the “lucky stroke of lewdness” is happening to someone other than the protagonist.

...If Ryuuga was here, I’d have to do my job earnestly.

I’d hand over this special seat to Ryuuga and say “Look. Breasts,” and let him take a good look at them.

However—I’m the only one here right now.

Places where Ryuuga isn’t in are just the story’s backstage. So this girl in the bed isn’t a heroine/candidate.

With that being the case, it’s okay if I take a look, right? It’s okay to take a look from time to time, right?!

(It seems that they’re an E cup? No wait, an F cup? Ah, God...never let me forget about this scene)

I offer a word of thanks in my prayers.

Suddenly, her body stirred quite a bit. Next her sleeping breaths stopped, and it seemed like she was rubbing her eyes. It appears that she’s woken up.

I would have loved it if it had lasted for an hour, but it looks like it’s time to stop. In the first place, I didn’t come here to admire breasts.

While she’s not fully awake yet, I close my curtains.

Just as I did that, she began to slowly get up. Unexpectedly, I could peek into her face from the gap.

In the end, God gave mercy upon me by letting me see her face. Thank you! I’ll be your disciple from now on!

(Ooh, she’s pretty cute and—)

However, in the next moment, my thoughts halted.

Once seeing her face, my brain completely stopped working.

(...wait what)

A beautiful girl with a well-figured nose, long eyelashes, and free-flowing hair. However, for some reason, she was wearing a boy's uniform. I thought she had a blouse, but on closer inspection, it was actually a collared shirt.

She may have had a youthful face. On the other hand though, she gave off a gallant feeling that was unbecoming of a girl. She had a particularly powerful glint in her eyes. She had a way of looking straight forward without any hesitation.

I recognize this person.

Or rather, I've been with her everyday. I've even invited her to my house.

(No way.)

It was—Ryuuga.

My close friend. The protagonist of this story. The boy secretly fighting peculiarities, who had the "Dragon King" dwelling within him—it was definitely Hinomori Ryuuga.

"yawn...Jeez, it's already this late?"

While I was frozen, Ryuuga yawned and spoke to nobody in particular. There was definitely cleavage on Ryuuga's chest. There was a valley of breasts there when there shouldn't be.

Hey, God. What the heck is this? What is this supposed to mean? What did you do to Ryuuga?

"...Huh, Ichirou?"

While I had turned into Jizo, Ryuuga noticed me before long. With the usual smile, Ryuuga sat on the edge of the bed and turned towards me.

(TLN: Statues of a figure named Jizo are common in Japan. You know how you can turn into an immobile statue in Super Mario Bros. 3? That's a Jizo statue. Ichirou is basically implying that he's frozen stiff)

“What now, did you skip out on class as well? That’s not good, you know? Knowing you, you’re probably organizing data about the girls ri—”

There, Ryuuga seemed to have finally realized the chest that was exposed.

“!”

Ryuuga immediately looked down at that E cup (my estimate) and froze for a brief while. At the same time, quickly turning pale from the realization.

“.....”

Ryuuga’s line of sight then turned towards me. A little while later, Ryuuga looked back to that chest, then back to me.

Meanwhile, I couldn’t say a single word. I even forgot to breathe.

The sound of the clock on the wall seemed to grow louder...then soon, Ryuuga took a deep breath.

“Ky, kyaaaaaaaaaaa!”

“?! ”

Immediately after, Ryuuga made a shriek in the school infirmary. It was a high-pitched shriek that I was hearing for the first time, it was something that I didn’t even hear before during the battle parts.

“Don’t look! You can’t look! You’ve got it wrong! This isn’t what you think!”

“?! ?! ?!”

Ryuuga fell into a panic. I was also in a deep panic.

I couldn’t understand what was happening, and could only go “?! ”

“I don’t have breasts! I have a flat chest!”

Ryuuga was frantically trying to fasten the buttons, but was violently trembling and couldn’t do it. All the while, Ryuuga’s feet were facing inwards.



“I don’t have a bust! Because I’m a man! A man among men! A male!”

Even if you say that, *that* thing is clearly there. It's more splendid than even Yukimiya's.

"Stop it already! I said don't look!"

Did Ryuuga say "Stop it already" just now? *(TLN: Not too experienced when it comes to this stuff, but I believe Ryuuga said it in a more childish way)*

"Argh, Ichirou, you idiot!" *(TLN: The legendary 'baka' was used here)*

Ryuuga threw a pillow straight into my face.

However, I did not make even the slightest of movements. I didn't even blink, I just kept staring at Ryuuga as if my soul was sucked out of me.

To be more precise, I was staring at Ryuuga's breasts, which were jiggling with energy.

Part 4

I was at a loss in face of this unprecedented emergency.

Even after Ryuuga ran off from the school infirmary on the verge of tears, I stayed absentmindedly on the bed for nearly an hour.

(What did...I see?)

I, who had earned a reputation through my reactions, could not make even one response.

Even now, it felt as if it was all just a dream. However, it's unfortunately a reality. The ripples on the sheets of the other bed, the other pillow that lay down beside me, both told the truth.

(Was that really Ryuuga? I didn't mistake one person for another?)

However, she definitely called me "Ichirou." She knew about me collecting data about the girls, and she also said that catchphrase of "Jeez."

—Hinomori Ryuuga is the protagonist of this world.

He's supposed to be a hero that makes a harem out of beautiful girls that fall in love with him.

Ryuuga isn't supposed to say "Kyaaa" or "Stop it already." There's no way that what was on Ryuuga's chest was just fat hanging down. There's no way my heart would start racing over that.

How am I supposed to come to grips with, comprehend, and understand this situation?

...I don't get it. I really can't judge the meaning of this event. I can't see a duty that's required of me here at all.

This incident was shocking, abrupt, and perplexing. Personally, I'd say that this is way more of a rapid development than if the "Evil Spirit" were to suddenly revive.

(Perhaps, Ryuuga has a twin?)

With my head still in a turmoil, I'm trying hard to search for answers.

Maybe there was a boy-girl set of twins, and today the girl came to school... perhaps that was the aforementioned surprising setting?

(Or perhaps, it's the work of the "Dragon King?")

As the price of lending such a mighty power, Ryuuga's chest swells? It would be the

"Dragon King's" curse of ample breasts...no, that's pretty absurd.

(I got it! It's an "Apostle of Hell!" An opponent that holds a gender-swap ability!)

If it's that, then it's pretty convincing. So that's why Ryuuga has been avoiding me recently. He thought that I would rub them, or to be more precise, massage them, if he told me about it.

...At any rate, I should move away from this topic of touching them.

I think taking a passive attitude would work the best. I'll wait until Ryuuga tells me about the truth. If he tries to deceive me, then I'll just obediently play along with him.

After all, I'm just a friend character.

I shouldn't get deeply involved with the main story.

Afterwards, when I returned to the classroom after lunch, Ryuuga had left early.

Instead, surrounding Ryuuga's seat were the three major heroines. The people in the class had gotten used to that recently and didn't get excited by it. At most, they took a glance with interest.

Or rather, from the start, I was the one making the uproar whenever the heroines appeared.

"Oh, Kobayashi."

Yukimiya bows after seeing me.

Recently, she's been adorning a pink ribbon near her bangs. It's a lovely article in the shape of a petal and it seems like she got it from her previous date

with Ryuuga.

“Huh, what’s wrong everyone? Did Ryuga have things to do? I’m also looking for him.”

“So that means he wasn’t with Kobayashi...”

Anticipating this would happen, I feigned ignorance. Aogasaki then had lifted her chin and groaned.

...It seems that they really don’t know what’s going on with Ryuuga. It’d do well to stay silent here.

“I wonder what’s going on with Ryuuga. He’s been a little odd lately. I feel that he’s always getting lost in his thoughts and that he hasn’t been paying attention.”

Elmira rested her head against her palm and sighed. The other two also did the same.

Well, if someone’s chest suddenly expanded, anyone would be dumbfounded. They likely would just want to stay in bed at the school’s infirmary.

(Ryuga right now has larger breasts than Yukimiya at the very least. If she realized that the person she’s in love with has a larger cup size than her... Yukimiya would surely turn over to the dark side.)

Not being aware of my inner thoughts, Yukimiya had an expression full of sorrow and softly stroked Ryuuga’s desk while muttering something.

“Recently, I’ve felt like Hinomori’s been shouldering something by himself...I wonder why he won’t talk to us.”

“He’s probably trying not to worry us. Though, the result of that is fruitless. In fact, we’re all completely worried about him now.”

“When asking the people in class, Ryuuga seemed to have returned to the classroom for just a moment before 4th period began. However, he took his bag and quickly left again.”

“Did you notice anything, Elmira?”

“I was sleeping.”

After hearing Elmira say that without ill-intent, Aogasaki and Yukimiya exchanged glances and both sighed.

It's very rare for the heroines to get involved in places that Ryuuga isn't at.

Happening to be present here, my duty would probably have to be telling Ryuuga how much they are worried. If this was my duty, then I would understand these courses of events, but I can't feel that's the case...

For a short while, the heroines were stuck in contemplation while making serious expressions.

Then, Yukimiya suddenly hit her palm with her fist, and raised her voice.

"I see. To cheer up Hinomori, how about we all prepare a feast for him?"

"A, a feast?"

"If he eats tasty things, his attitude will turn positive. I'm sure Hinomori will feel like telling us about his troubles then."

I thought it was nice, heroine-like idea, but the other two disagreed.

Aogasaki's face turned stiff after hearing Yukimiya. She looked unwell somehow.

"Shiori. Let me confirm this, but...when you say 'delicious feast,' you mean one of those dishes you've made yourself, right?"

"Right. But this time, let's make it together. Of course, since I'm the one proposing this, please entrust the supreme command to me!"

"It'll turn into a funeral!"

Elmira was also shaken up, which was rare. Her crimson, wavy hair swayed as she shuddered. So she could do such a thing as well?

Well, enough of that...I get the gist of what's going on.

The righteous heroine, Yukimiya Shiori, has the "meal disaster attribute."

Thinking about it, it's a perfectly natural setting for her, who's a daughter of a high-class family. Hey Yukimiya, don't you have a mischievous side to you? A wicked side?

“To tell the truth, recently I’ve learned how to make beef stroganoff. When my butler, Sebastian, tried it, he toppled over and had a spasm from how tasty it was!”

Yukimiya definitely brought along a homemade lunch that she made herself during that time she went on a date.

I’m sure that Ryuuga would try to eat it all though. Imagine trying to eat something giving off a purple miasma while holding a refreshing smile.

You really are amazing, Ryuuga.

“Elmira, what do we do...what do we do to get out of this crisis before our lives?”

“R, Rei, can you not shake me. I’m very sorry! Even though vampires have posion resistance, there’s still a dose that’s lethal for them!”

In front of the “The Shrine Maiden of Life,” “The Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance” and “The Blood-kin of Eternal Darkness” were holding an emergency meeting.

To be honest, I’m not really in the mood for comedy, but since they’re main characters, I’ll watch.

I’ll probably go ahead and say “Ryuuga really is a lucky person” or something of that sort, thus ending this scene...but as I was thinking about it, something happened at that moment.

This time it was Elmira that hit her palm with her fist.

It’s probably some plan to avoid their fate. A measure to avoid having to face death due to the beef stroganoff. Well then, do keep amusing yourselves.

“O, oh right! Shiori, how about having Kobayashi Ichirou taste your cooking to check it first?”

I’m about to beat you up, you damn vampire.

“I, I see. I do think that a boy’s sense of taste and a girl’s sense of taste differ. This is the chance for Kobayashi to be the victim..err, I mean, to be the consultant.”

You as well, you Holstein swordswoman?

The protagonist's friend does indeed suffer through some disasters. I would gladly let anything come my way if it meant making the daily life part more amusing. However, I'm going to refuse for this particular case.

After all, the crucial character in this episode, Ryuuga, isn't here!

This is just a game of torture that's happening backstage!

Don't drag me into this! I'm aware of the heroines' secrets, but that's all to it! I am not friends with you people!

I can't forcibly bring these courses of events to a close anymore.

I was supposed to say "Ryuuga really is a lucky person" and end things. Yet, before I could do that, these people went ahead and raised pointless flags!

"Ryuuga really is a lucky..."

"Kobayashi, you're a man, so show it to us. You need to do this to make up for what happened before."

Don't hide your intentions behind your words, Aogasaki!

Also, don't raise a flag by saying that!

"Ryuuga really is..."

"I have expectations for you, Kobayashi Ichirou. In the end, you're a human that Ryuuga really trusts. You're surely not an ordinary person."

What are you saying, Elmira!

I am an ordinary person! I'm the incarnation of an ordinary person!

"Ryuuga really..."

"Kobayashi. I'll let you talk about how delicious it was. But, I won't let you eat me. Hee hee."

Yukimiya! You can't say that, even to Ryuuga! No matter how much of an airhead you are, you can't do that!

I don't need that kind of wickedness from you! Also, your butler's name is Sebastian! As expected, that's way too cliché so fire him!

(Not good...at this rate, I'm going to end up having more pointless interactions with them)

This position of "playing around with the heroines" is reserved for only the protagonist. If I arbitrarily take part in a food-sampling gathering with them, then I won't be able to show my face to Ryuuga as a friend.

Leaving that aside, Ryuuga's chest probably hurts right now. That collared shirt looked tight, so it's probably causing pain towards the chest area.

I should probably refuse...was what I thought, but Aogasaki put her hand on my shoulder.

Then she said the finishing blow on behalf of the heroines.

"Kobayashi, you really are a lucky person."

That day, I genuinely got a headache, so I left early just like Ryuuga.

Part 5

It's been a whole two days since then, and Ryuuga hasn't come to school.

It seems the heroines are planning to visit Ryuuga, so I'll watch their movements for the moment. According to the girls, Ryuuga said "I caught a cold," to them.

"I've lost my worry. It's nothing more than a mere virus, humans really are weak."

Elmira, along with the others, were saying such things while laughing with an "[Ohohoho](#)". I'd prefer if she remembered not to reveal her true nature.

...Though, there's one thing I know. Ryuuga definitely doesn't have a common cold.

Ryuuga is absent because of a "gender-swapped" body. And perhaps from also receiving a shock after me seeing that body.

(Perhaps Ryuuga's heart also changed into that of a female's. That could explain why Ryuuga let out a shriek...)

If so, that must have been one frightening apostle. There's never been an enemy that drove Ryuuga into a corner like this before.

Though, I'm just guessing when talking about this being the work of an "Apostle of Hell."

At present, I have nothing to confirm it. And finally, there's also one possibility that I've been trying to keep my mind off of. I've been pretending not to be aware of it.

(There's no use worrying about it. I think I'll wait out on this matter. I should just be patient until Ryuga decides to approach me.)

...Then on the third day after school, that opportunity came quicker than expected.

Once home room ended, I left the school with a dash once again so that the heroines wouldn't find me.

I can't stand them bringing up the conversation of "taste-tasting poisonous cooking" again. I'm sure once Ryuuga comes back, that plan will fall through.

(I might as well be absent until Ryuga returns)

While I was thinking of such things, my cell phone suddenly rang. I was about a few meters away from home.

Looking at the screen, I found that I had received a message. The sender was—Hinomori Ryuuga.

I stopped at that moment and immediately checked the message.

I can guess the gist of how it's going to be. Ryuuga isn't the kind of person to send pointless messages. The composition of the messages are also short and simple.

'Ichirou. Do you have time right now? There's something I want to talk about.'

That was the only thing written.

It seems Ryuuga's planning to reveal something to me before the heroines get to find out...I feel that this is a bit of an excessive role for a mere friend character, but thinking about it, I was the one that saw Ryuuga's breasts. I'm the only one that has already set one foot into the matter.

If the protagonist has chosen me, then I have no choice but to meet those demands. I'll have to be the one that's consulted. I've been prepared to get involved with the main story ever since my current position turned into what it is now.

(I'm not sure what exactly I can do to help though...)

With a bit of worry, I replied 'Alright. Could you come to my house?'

Ryuuga doesn't have a cold, so coming over to my home should be fine. I practically live alone at my house, so we should be able to talk there without restraint.

'I understand. I'll head there in about ten minutes.'

Soon, another short message had arrived. When this person says that it'll take ten minutes to come over, that means it'll only take five. Hinomori Ryuuga can sprint a hundred meters in nearly four seconds.

(So it's been decided, I should hurry back home and prepare some tea.)

...I did not know yet at that time, but I should not have rashly taken on the task of being consulted.

Everything that I had been building up laboriously would collapse in one moment. The "protagonist's friend" position that I was somehow able to maintain would now approach its demise.

I didn't have much time after I came home, as Ryuuga had soon arrived.

At first glance, there wasn't anything that seemed particularly off. Ryuuga didn't seem distant, and appeared just the same as before.

"Hey Ichirou, I wonder if I came too early."

"No, the tea is just about ready. Come in."

I tried to answer as I normally do, and let Ryuuga into the living room. Ryuuga was in a uniform and even had a bag. It looked just like we had just come from school as usual.

...I sneaked a glance at the chest area for just a moment, and there was nothing bulging.

(Huh, no breasts? Did the problem already get solved? Then, what is Ryuga consulting me for? A post-event report?)

We've been sitting on the table across from each other for about a minute.

For some reason, Ryuuga had difficulty trying to speak, staring down into the teacup as steam from the tea rose.

"....."

"....."

This kind of feels like a formal marriage interview, it's very uncomfortable.

I realized that I had been subconsciously kneeling. I only kneel like this when things get tense, such as that time I was admiring those breasts or that time I got scolded at.

(The atmosphere here feels a bit heavy...perhaps making some foolish talk can loosen things up.)

However, “breasts” are a forbidden word in face of the current Ryuuga. That makes things quite restricting. Most of my remarks are sealed off now.

(Oh right, I have to tell Ryuga how much the heroines are worried. I’ll also talk about the meal they’re making so that I can free myself from having to taste poison—)

As I was thinking as such, Ryuuga interrupted by looking up.

It seems Ryuuga finally wants to speak. In that case, I don’t need to say anything. The protagonist’s words take priority over every other conversation.

Ryuuga’s expression looked very determined.

Seeing Ryuuga in this way, that face really does look too beautiful for a man. With skin that smooth, lips that petite, and a jaw too slender, it quite honestly seems like—

“Ichirou. I had said before that...I was hiding something from you, right?”

“Ah, right.”

“Of course, I intended on keeping the “Dragon King,” the nature of Shiori, Rei and Elle, and the ‘Apostles of Hell’ a secret as well. If you knew about them, you’d be in danger of getting dragged into it as well, Ichirou.”

I know Ryuuga. I know that you’ve been worrying about such things.

“However, you know about them now.”

“.....”

To that, I can only say “I’m sorry.” This really is improper of me and is above my boundaries as a friend character.

However, judging from Ryuuga’s tone of voice, it doesn’t seem like the intent is to blame me. Ryuuga’s gaze is mild and those eyes don’t have a scowl to them.

When talking before about what was supposedly a secret, Ryuuga had said ‘I felt painfully guilty the entire time I was keeping this a secret from you.’

Ryuuga’s voice resounded within the silent living room.

“Ichirou, you know most of my secrets. Even so, there was just one I had

planned to keep hidden from you.”

“.....”

“It’s that—I’m a girl.”

...Ah. So it really was like that.

So that was your surprising setting, huh?

Well, I was aware of it somewhere deep down. Or rather, I’ve kept my eye on the possibility of it since the beginning.

For a boy, Ryuuga indeed had androgynous looks and a slender physique.

Getting close, Ryuuga also had a bit of a pleasant scent, and we never went to the restroom together either. When I got playful and embraced Ryuuga from behind, I’d get thrown off and receive a fury that was at the point where it could kill me.

Yet even so, I still convinced myself that Ryuuga wasn’t a woman. I made up the arbitrary explanation that it was just Ryuuga’s character design because I didn’t want anything weird happening between us.

Things remained that way until that day I saw Ryuuga’s breasts.

“Now that you mention it, that does explain a couple of things. I’ve been with you everyday Ryuga, so I had noticed some things that made me go ‘Huh?’”

“...That would be the case, wouldn’t it.”

Ryuuga made a shoulder shrug and a bitter smile. That gesture just now was completely girl-like.

“However, I ignored such doubts I had. I told myself that you were a man, and that it was best to keep thinking so. I had thought that it would best for you as well...”

“It seems I inadvertently made you worry about me. Sorry about that, Ichirou.”

There’s nothing you need to apologize about.

I had turned a blind eye to those doubts in accordance to my own wishes. It was because of my own personal circumstances, as I had thought “If things

were actually like that, then I'd be troubled."

After all, if the protagonist was a woman, then various things would collapse!

The heroines wouldn't be heroines anymore! The protagonist themselves is the heroine!

That's not all. My position would also become really weird!

It means that up until now, I've been telling a girl about the three sizes of other girls. I've invited a girl to peep on other girls changing clothes.

I'm not even on the realm of a perverted character anymore. I'm just a person with no sense of delicacy.

(I didn't want to know this...I had hoped that it was just the work of an apostle...)

I wonder what Ryuuga makes of me being stricken with grief right now. Actually, I wonder what Ryuuga makes of everything I've done so far.

"However, I think that this is for the best. It was really unpleasant keeping this a secret from you, Ichirou..."

He (actually, I should use 'she,' shouldn't I?) picked up the teacup for the first time and took a sip of the tea.

Seeing Ryuuga blow into the tea to cool it down was oddly cute. Having an intolerance for hot drinks is seen as a detriment for men, but for a woman it's seen as a merit.

"Ichirou, there was something you told me. When you said that you would be my friend no matter what...that had caused some turmoil inside me at that time. I had wondered if that was really okay. I wondered if it was fine to just stay as friends."

"Huh?"

"You're someone precious to me, Ichirou. Only when I'm with you am I able to forget about my mission. Only when I'm with you...can I feel the most relieved, Ichirou."

"Um?"

“That’s why, to be honest, I don’t enjoy it when you talk with other girls. When you said ‘I can probably see your panties’ to Rei, I accidentally hit you. When we were doing karaoke, I wanted it to be just the two of us alone.”

...Wait a minute.

Isn’t the flow of this conversation taking a weird turn? What is this person saying?

Hinomori Ryuuga is a girl—I already have no choice but to accept that. Just that confession alone was a lot to take in.

And yet, I can’t shake off this uneasy premonition. I have a hunch that an even more startling confession is about to happen. How about we stop this conversation, Ryuuga. Let’s talk more about something like the “Apostles of Hell.”

As I was terrified, Ryuuga continued relentlessly talking.

“Ichirou, sorry. I have to...let my desires loose.”

“D, desires?”

“Even though you know my secrets, your interactions with me haven’t changed, Ichirou. When I noticed that...I wanted to tell you everything after that incident in the school infirmary.”

Before I knew it, my heartbeat unexpectedly skyrocketed. It wasn’t hot, and yet I was sweating from my forehead.

While I was like that, Ryuuga directly stared at me.

From the time we first met, Ryuuga’s eyes were powerful and held no hesitation. But right now, those eyes were getting teary.

“Listen, Ichirou. I’m going to go back to being a girl here. This is something I’m showing only to you, my true self.” (*TLN: Ryuuga switches from using the ‘ore’ pronoun to the more feminine ‘watashi’ pronoun.*)

“.....”

“Do you want to try being in love?”

“...what?”

“After all, there will come a day where I’ll go back to living as a woman. I want to do some ‘lovers training’ for that time.”

This was a little different from the love confession that I was fearing. However, that was enough to make me blank out.

“You’re the only one I can ask this of, Ichirou...so when it’s just the two of us together, I hope that you can look at me not as a friend, but as a woman.”

—This is dire, Yukimiya, Aogasaki, vampire, and that one childhood friend.

Your heroine routes were all closed off in one go. The protagonist wants to become a heroine! Rather than a training event for controlling the “Dragon King,” a more immense training event has arrived!

That’s not all. My position completely fell apart once again! The protagonist isn’t letting me be a friend!

While I was turning pale, Ryuuga was turning red.

For some reason, Ryuuga’s voice felt a little more high-pitched than usual. This might Ryuuga’s natural voice.

“The ‘Dragon King’ of the Hinomori household was originally supposed to be inherited by boys. So, when only girls are born, the successor will be raised as a boy. I think it’s a stupid rule, but it’s been in place for hundreds of years so there’s not much I can do.”

“.....”

“However, it’s impossible for me to be a man at heart. After all, I’m a girl. With how close we are, I can’t see you as a mere friend, Ichirou.”

Ryuuga becomes increasingly talkative and doesn’t even wait for my responses.

Perhaps Ryuuga was completely coming clean, and is feeling relieved deep down in the heart. There’s probably a great sense of freedom in not having to act like a “man” in front of me anymore.

“All we have to do is act like lovers. After all, the two of us have already gone out together to many places, haven’t we? It was like we were having dates.”

Indeed, I've gone out with Ryuuga a lot.

To the arcade, family restaurants, adult video game stores, the adult section of film rental stores...wait, those were dates? Doesn't that make me the worst kind of guy?

I see. So that's why Ryuuga has been saying things like "Let's go to a fancier cafe," or "We might as well watch a movie, how about a romantic one?"

That wasn't just putting on airs, but was actually coming from a maiden's mind?

"To let you know, since my breasts are quite noticeable, I normally wrap them with a sarashi. Ah, I'm wearing it right now."

Aogasaki, it seems that it was the right choice for you to wear a bra. We've got a sarashi character already.

"Oh right, I'll make a boxed lunch for you next time. I'm worried about how you're only eating bread from the convenience store. I'm quite confident in my cooking skills."

Yukimiya, if I told you that "Ryuuga is good at cooking," then you'd probably be disappointed. It seems like only Sebastian will know how your beef stroganoff is.

"Alright, I feel a little better now. I'll go to school again tomorrow. I'll also do my best to fight the apostles harder than ever!"

Ryuuga made a bit of a triumphant pose using both hands.

"O, oh..."

"Ah, please interact with me in the same way as usual during school. This is top secret, so you can't disclose this to even Shiori, Rei, or Elle, okay?"

Ryuuga leans forward on the table and holds an index finger to the mouth.

"O, oh..."

"Also, I'm prohibiting you from spectating the battles because it's dangerous. I don't want to be seen as boy-like by you, Ichirou."

While fiddling with the hair, Ryuuga made an embarrassed grin while going

“Eh heh heh.”

“O, oh...”

“Don’t worry. I won’t lose. Recently, I’ve even managed to take considerable control over the ‘Dragon King.’ I’ll be fine no matter what kind of apostle comes my way. Therefore, this world has already been saved, so reward me with a kiss...kyaa! What am I saying! We’re just pretending to be lovers right now.”

Hinomori Ryuuga got excited and placed both hands on cheeks. That appearance is pretty much like a girl no matter how you look at it.

This is “The Successor of the Dragon King?”

The one who can use “Dragon Fang (that’s what I’m calling it)?”

(I don’t know what to do with this person anymore...or rather, I’m not sure what to do with myself...)

In other words, I might have changed from a “friend character” to a provisional “lover character?”

This is happening to such a generic, ordinary person like me? To a guy like me who’s shamelessly been repeating acts of perversion?

That’s not good. This change in policy is out of line, as to be expected. I don’t have much knowledge at all about such a position. This is a role completely outside my area of expertise.

I have to do something.

Can I not somehow go back to being a friend character?

Rather than my role being Ryuuga’s boyfriend—I want to play a role that’s more like a frilled lizard, similar to before.

Part 6

I—Hinomori Ryuuga, have been raised as a male for as long as I remember.

As a child, I didn't think that it would be hard. From the start, I had a lively nature, and I found it fun being in the role of a hero when playing.

"Ryuuga. As a child of the Hinomori household, you must sacrifice your current life to summon the 'Dragon King.' You have to toss away your life as an ordinary girl, please forgive me..."

My father always said that.

"It's alright, father."

Of course, I answered him with a smile.

There are enemies of this world, the "Apostles of Hell"—I have to protect this world from their invasion.

I thought that I had understood the weight of this mission. I didn't want to push such a fate onto my younger sister, Kyouka.

However...as I grew older, I started to feel let down over how I couldn't wear skirts or how I couldn't get my personal belongings in the color pink, which I really liked.

(I have no choice but to be a boy...)

No matter how manly I acted, my heart and body couldn't deceive me.

Unlike those around me, my voice didn't change. My height wasn't that tall either. Yet despite that, my chest swelled.

Even though I held such a sense of discomfort, I still continued to live my life training.

A little under five years ago, my family crossed over to China and I went under strict training from a renowned teacher. Even now my parents are still remaining there and are investigating the ruler of the apostles, the "Evil Spirit."

...Then came that moment. At the time where I was about to turn into a high

schooler, we received reports that “the ‘Apostles of Hell’ are making appearances in Japan.”

The place was a town that I had lived in before—a town protected by the Hinomori family, where several hundreds of years ago, the “Evil Spirit” was sealed away by one of my fabled ancestors.

(If I complete this mission, I wonder if I can return to being a girl...)

While keeping such a fleeting hope to myself, I soon returned back to Japan with Kyouka. Since my sister was also about to move on to junior high school, it was decided that we would both live in Japan.

We settled on attending Oumei High School since it was the closest to my home.

We made up an explanation to the school that I was born frail and that even now I have to regularly visit the hospital. It was convenient for frequently slipping out of class and being absent during PE and swimming.

(I don’t have the spare time to enjoy a high school life. The apostles are already lurking all over the town...as the successor of the ‘Dragon King,’ I have to exterminate them all!)

That day, I entered the school entrance ceremony with such a resolve in my heart.

Then—I came across one boy.

“Hey, are you a part of this class?”

I haven’t forgotten the start of it all. He came over and said those few words.

...To be honest, I was surprised at that time. The reason being that I hadn’t sensed any signs of his presence at all.

I really didn’t notice him until he approached and let out his voice.

(W, what kind of person...is this guy?)

I was wary since the “Apostles of Hell” could take on the form of a human, but I didn’t feel any ill-will from him. He introduced himself as “Kobayashi Ichirou” in a friendly manner, and seemed so defenseless that it felt amiss.

My first impression was that he felt like “that high school student you can find just about anywhere.”

He had a medium build, and his looks were average as well. It was hard to find any special characteristics in him...and yet, for some reason, he had a strange presence. He was a paradoxical boy that you wouldn't remember, but wouldn't forget.

I only just entered school and I had already met a strange person...that was all I was aware of at that time.

However, the situation was more troublesome than I thought. Starting from the next day, he persistently followed me however he pleased.

No matter how many times I said “I don't want you to get involved with me,” he didn't listen. He followed me around everywhere while saying “Ryuga this, Ryuga that.” I had planned on not making friends so that my identity as a girl wouldn't get revealed...

“Hey, Kobayashi. I'm telling you, leave me alone.”

“Ah, I understand. Anyways, Yukimiya Shiori, having a C cup, is super cute and...”

“You don't understand.”

“I do understand. Let's see, her three sizes were...”

“Like I said, you don't understand!”

“Never mind that, listen up! This is where you hand in the test!”

“What are you getting mad for! I didn't even receive that test!”

Ichirou caused me headaches for a long time.

However, I didn't hate him.

He was a difficult guy, but he was never a bad person. I saw him carrying an old woman on his back over a crosswalk one time. I also saw him put a 1000 yen bill in a donation box after the people were struggling to get any results for more than ten minutes.

It's not like he only caused me trouble either.

For example, Ichirou often followed me when I was being isolated within the class.

There were several friend groups in the class. Ichirou was able to socialize with them all skillfully, and served as a middleman between them and me. I was very grateful for that.

“You have pretty high communication skills, Kobayashi...”

“Of course. I’m a maestro at being a friend after all.”

“Don’t you think it would be more enjoyable to be with everyone else rather than me?”

“No. I’m only interested in you.”

It seemed that he just casually said that, but it startled me

That was the first time a boy told me such a thing.

I’ve come across many cool boys up until this point. Those kinds of people tend to be around me for some reason.

Kobayashi Ichirou was not an ikemen by any means. He only talks about perverted things and he often forgets to do his homework. He’s someone that you’d nonchalantly gloss over.

...However, that left a rather good impression.

At our age, one tends to get particularly aware of the opposite sex. So I believe that “someone’s true face” only shows up when they’re with the same sex.

And I felt that Ichirou’s true face was—quite wonderful.

I thought of him as more fascinating than any of the boys I had come across.

In the first place, I’m weak to the pushy type. When someone approaches in a bold manner, I inadvertently just nod along. For that reason, I haven’t been able to turn down Yukimiya, Aogasaki, and Elle’s approaches.

(If Ichirou knew my true identity, I wonder what he would think...)

Before I knew it, I came to worry about such a thing at around the time when I started calling him by his first name.

The battle against the “Apostles of Hell” was gradually intensifying. In that time, I had obtained some companions who held a similar fate as me, but the opponents were also getting tougher in proportion.

(Perhaps if Ichirou held some kind of ‘power,’ then we could fight alongside each other...)

I had wanted him to be with me not just in the daily side of life, but also in the supernatural side of it. I wanted to rely on him...I had realized that my dependence on him was sprouting.

I began to suspect that Ichirou did indeed hold “certain qualities.”

He has insane reflexes. When he has the motivation, he can also study pretty well. He’s good at drawing too, can soon master any kind of instrument, and has good communication skills. While I’m at it, I also get suddenly poked by him because of some mysterious stealth ability he holds.

Those qualities he holds are—as one would call them, “the qualities of a protagonist.”

Undoubtedly, if Ichirou put his mind to it, he could take the leading role in any field.

Perhaps if he held some kind of “power,” the apostles wouldn’t even be a threat to him. I’m being a bit partial towards him, but that is my evaluation of Ichirou.

(Ichirou, being such a person, sees me as special. He said that he was only interested in me.)

Of course, he thinks that I’m a man. Because of that, we can only have a “friendship.” It’s impossible for our relationship to deviate from that rail.

When thinking about that, I felt a stinging pain in my heart.

At that moment...I had come to realize these feelings that I seemed to have held for a while now.

One day, I was pleased to realize that Ichirou and I were in the same class still during our second-year. Then one major event occurred.

Ichirou had seen my battle with the apostles.

There, I resolved myself to reveal to him about my circumstances.

From the beginning, I had felt guilty about keeping these things a secret from Ichirou. Day by day, my guilt grew stronger as I kept deceiving him...if Ichirou started avoiding me, then our relationship as friends would end. He would go back to being unrelated to me.

However, it turned out that Ichirou would still be my best friend.

He told me that he would be my friend no matter what.

That made me so joyful that I wanted to cry. However, at the same time, I felt a pressure in my heart.

The matter of “being friends” was once again thrust at me. It had triggered a great turmoil within me.

With our current relationship, he only sees me as a friend. If I can make Ichirou my lover one day...such a blessing would make me smile.

I would be joyful if he was my lover.

I want to hold hands with Ichirou while walking.

I want to get angry at him for peeking at me while I’m changing clothes.

I want to go to his home every morning and wake him up.

I want him to open his mouth while I feed him my boxed lunch.

Of course, I know that this is “forbidden” for me to do as a child of the Hinomori household. That’s why I’ve been stubbornly keeping this a secret since the beginning.

I wanted to message him saying “I’m a girl. I like you.” many times. However, I end up erasing them without sending. I’ve been putting up with it by secretly taking pictures of Ichirou on my cell phone.

(I wonder if there’s something I can do...even with this important mission I have...)

I decided to be cautious and put some distance between Ichirou and myself. However, another incident happened.

Ichirou found out that I was a girl.

I had decided to take a nap at the school infirmary because during the night before, I was pondering what to do and didn't get any sleep. I took off the painful sarashi and carelessly slept like that.

Ichirou saw me in that state.

I felt that this meant our relationship had collapsed.

(What do I do? What do I do? What do I do...!)

I had never lost my composure like that before, even during my fights with the apostles. I told Shiori and the others that "I caught a cold," to drive them away. I didn't want to see anybody.

I hadn't contacted Ichirou at all though. I felt too uneasy to. I was too frightened and nervous to.

(I have to properly talk with Ichirou. It's impossible for me to deceive him anymore.)

...Perhaps deep down in my heart, I had hoped this would happen.

I was at my limit anyways. My feelings for Ichirou had already reached a point where I couldn't control them. It was like an inflating balloon that was about to burst.

After two days of being in turmoil, I resolved myself.

For the first and last time in my life, I decided to be self-indulgent and reveal my feelings.

—I want to do some 'lovers training' with you, Ichirou—

It was a bit pathetic that at the last moment, I backed out by making this request. However,

Ichirou was flabbergasted and only said "O, oh..." if I remember correctly. He had also said that he vaguely knew about me being a girl and that he was taking my needs into consideration.

So perhaps—he gave me his OK.

Though it was just "pretending" right now, I became Ichirou's lover, which I had dreamed about!

I'm glad I summoned up my courage...

I don't have to control myself any longer. It's okay to be a girl in front of Ichirou.

Does it matter that doing this goes against the rules? I'll do this even with those stupid rules.

(My love and my mission can co-exist. I can also check if "the power of love" can make someone stronger! Then one day, I will genuinely be Ichirou's girlfriend!)

...I held such an overwhelming spirit. Since then, the "Dragon King" hasn't been going wild.

I somehow managed to take complete control of it, it's entirely like an obedient child now. This is a private, but I've been secretly calling the "Dragon God" by the name of "Ron."

There's nothing Hinomori Ryuuga fears anymore. I'll completely crush the "Apostles of Hell."

There's just one concern I have right now—

(Ichirou is the eldest son, but I wonder if it's okay for him to be taken into the family.)

If the Hinomori lineage, which is protecting this world, ends, that would be bad, as one would expect.

Chapter 3

Part 1

It's been a day since Ryuuga was revealed to be a woman.

She arrived at school completely full of spirit.

She said "Good morning," to me with the usual refreshing smile, and headed towards her seat near the window in the back with light steps. All while humming a tune, oddly enough.

Yukimiya, Aogasaki, and Elmira surrounded Ryuuga's seat this morning as well. It seems they already knew that Ryuuga was coming to school.

"Hinomori, is your cold okay now?"

"Yep. Sorry for worrying you, Shiori."

"Good grief, a master of martial arts should also know how to manage one's health."

"I'll keep your advise in mind, Rei."

"As punishment for making us worry, let me absorb some blood from you."

"S, stop it Elle! It's not good to do it here!"

The three are the same as ever, competing for Ryuuga. They're completely unaware that their heroine routes were cut off.

...At first glance, nothing seems odd, this is a familiar sight. Seeing Ryuuga say "Jeez," with a bitter smile, it almost seemed like yesterday never happened.

However, I can't escape from reality anymore. There's that ordeal about the true Hinomori Ryuuga.

A girl who yesterday, had suddenly swapped out of the school uniform's pants for a mini-skirt she carried.

A girl who after doing so, made miso soup for some reason.

A girl who said “Don’t gather data about girls anymore,” as I was about to leave.

And finally, a girl who whispered “Instead, I’ll tell you about my three sizes,” into my ear.

—That girl back then is no doubt the boy sitting right there. Definitely not a twin or a look-alike, but the same person.

(What should I do...)

Leaving aside the main characters, I need to think about what my position will be from now on.

From my standpoint, this is a very unstable position right now.

I went and learned that Ryuuga is a girl.

Then, Ryuuga requested that we be semi-lovers.

Furthermore, things had progressed little by little.

In addition to keeping this secret that not even the heroines know about, another secret had result from it.

(How nice things would be if she was just a man who only looked like a woman...)

Those kinds of characters are called “traps” by society. Unfortunately, Ryuuga has breasts. She admitted herself that she’s an E cup.

She’s really a girl after all. He’s a she, and furthermore is on the verge of becoming my girlfriend.

...As expected, this won’t do. Of course, I like Ryuuga, but those feelings are similar to “respect and admiration.” As a result of not treating Ryuuga like a girl, our relationship was the kind where we would calmly put our arms around each others shoulders and share a pack of juice.

A minor change as a friend character is still within my limits, but a story about being “the protagonist’s lover” is in a completely different realm.

Even though it seems that I’m just temporarily her boyfriend, that position is already one that’s supposed to belong to a main character. Or rather, an

important character. Naturally, that would be the kind of character that would appear in the anime's opening, let alone appearing in the character introduction column.

(Can I carry such a major duty...? Absolutely not. I know that about myself the best.)

Having a person named Kobayashi Ichirou be the female protagonist's companion is a big miscast.

The protagonist's sweetheart is supposed to be a likeable youth or a handsome man. They should be a cool and sensible figure, like how Ryuuga has been.

So far I've been a guy making a fuss about "breasts" or "panties," so this isn't a position I'm fit for.

(In the first place, why did she choose me as her pseudo boyfriend...perhaps Ryuga is the type of woman to get involved with a good-for-nothing guy.)

As I was thinking, Ryuuga and the others were flirting around. They're fellow female friends though.

"Um, Hinomori. Are you free this Sunday? I wanted to go to the movies together once more..."

Former heroine/candidate Yukimiya Shiori was bashfully speaking to Ryuuga.

"I'm pretty sure it's my turn to go on a date with him next. I heard that a sword exhibition is being held at the department store on the weekend. Don't you want to go, Ryuuga?"

Former heroine/candidate Aogasaki Rei immediately took part in the conversation.

"No. Ryuuga is supposed to talk with me all night about 'what the scariest horror movie is.'"

Former heroine/candidate Elmira McCartney bumps in, of course.

I feel a little sorry for these three. There's no way their love can be fulfilled. The reason for that is because the one Ryuuga wants is...me.

So like that, the bell rang, and the heroines reluctantly dispersed.

I no longer make an uproar towards the popular Ryuuga anymore. Ryuuga insistently told me “they’re just friends.” That would be the case, they’re fellow female friends after all.

(Please let me wind back time...to the start of the first semester...)

Before long, Minegishi appeared, starting homeroom.

Then, I received a message on my cellphone. It was from Ryuuga.

‘It’s okay. I plan on spending time with you this weekend, Ichirou!’

I’m at my wits’ end.

‘Come to my house today. Get here quick, though you’re just accompanying me for training! I want you to do things like carrying me in your arms or patting my head lots of times! Later on, I’d like you to be on good terms with my sister, and eventually I could introduce you to my parents as well, so—’

My hand that was holding the cellphone began to tremble.

After being revealed as a girl, Ryuuga’s messages have been getting excessively lengthy. It’s only been a day since the incident, and yet I’ve gotten over twenty messages now.

Where did the cool Ryuuga go?

It doesn’t seem like I can go back to being charmed by the hero Hinomori Ryuuga anymore.

“Look, look Ichirou. Ta-da.”

After school, I was forcibly taken to the Hinomori house and was faced with Ryuuga wearing a nurse outfit.

She was carefully holding a syringe, but that skirt is awfully short. Her legs, which were wrapped in pure white knee-high socks, were slender but well-proportioned, and looked very healthy and risque. On her emphasized chest was a name tag that said “Hinomori.”



...Of course, this is just cosplay. Ryuuga bought a “girl’s costume set” online.

By the way, this is her third costume. There was a yukata and qipao before, and now there's a nurse costume. There are still many outfits inside her closet.

The only other person who knows about this secret collection is her sister, Kyouka...I didn't think that a suppressed woman's heart could manifest in this sort of way.

"Kobayashi~, can I help you with anything today?"

"Um...I've caught a cold."

"How grave! We have to perform surgery immediately!"

"No, it's just a common cold."

"First of all, how about we give you double eyelids?"

"Don't."

"Then, let's adjust your eyebrows since they seem a bit thick."

"Leave them be."

For the time being, I'll keep going with this charade.

What the heck am I even doing. I wonder at what point did our roles as funny man and straight man reverse?

...Fortunately, today's fashion show ended with only three outfits.

While saying "Ah, that was fun," in a good mood, Ryuuga sat down next to me. With her legs out to the side...that way of sitting is pretty much like a girl's now.

(...Things have quieted down it seems.)

Ryuuga's room is pretty spacious. It seems about the size of a school's classroom. What's more, the floor's made up of tatamis and the door is a fusuma in a true Japanese fashion. (*TLN: A fusuma is a sliding door made of paper/cloth in a wooden frame*)

As expected of a family with an ancient and honorable lineage, the Hinomori house was an old-fashioned, samurai-looking residence. My house would only take up the courtyard of this place.

Considering that Ryuuga's only living with her younger sister, I think that this is a tremendous splurge. Though, Ryuuga told me that "Shiori's home is as big as ten houses."

(This is the fourth time I've come here, but today I especially don't feel relaxed.)

The reason is obvious. Ryuuga is tightly clinging to me.

Even though this room is so wide, we're close enough that our shoulders are touching and that we're holding hands.

Ever since that confession, when the two of us are alone, physical contact with Ryuuga gets extreme. It's a matter of serious concern for me.

From the entrance to this room, I had to princess carry Ryuuga. The moment I laid her onto a cushion, she demanded that I pat her head. I wonder if this is also a result of having to live her life as a man...

"Hey, Ichirou. What kind of outfit do you want to see next?"

Resting her head on my shoulder, Ryuuga says so with a voice like that of a spoiled child's.

"I also have maid uniforms, cheerleader outfits, swimsuits, and other costumes. Don't you have a request?"

"Then, an armored warrior..."

"I don't have that. That's not cute!"

"What about a football player..."

"Why is it only things with armor! I prohibit anything that looks gallant!"

Nurse Ryuuga pokes me in the forehead with puffed up cheeks. At first glance, it seems like a cute act, but I could feel that poke in the center of my head. As expected of a battle expert.

(However, I'm wondering if this is really just "pretending to be lovers"...isn't she being unusually clingy? If this goes on, this lie might become truth...)

From time to time she goes back to being a hero and engages in serious fights. I can't say the danger of this becoming genuine to Ryuuga, nor can I say

to her that “things will never work out” with me.

The reason for is because when taking another look at her as a girl...she’s right in my strike zone—

(I, I shouldn’t be thinking about stupid things. I have to abstain from my worldly desires! I will reach enlightenment!)

While I was reprimanding myself, Ryuuga tightly clung to my arm....A certain something is in contact with me. It’s pressing against me. Honestly speaking, I do like it, but, guh, calm down, my lower-half!

“...That reminds me Ichirou. There was something you said back at the karaoke center.”

“H, huh?”

“You asked if I was hiding something from you...what did you mean by that?”

Even if I’m asked that, the only thing I can answer with is “because it’s a cliché development.” That was just me showing a perceptive side as a close friend, and on the contrary, it would have been bad if I actually received an honest reply.

In the end though, my peeping of battles was found out, and I ended up having to listen to the circumstances of Ryuuga and the others.

Considering that...I can’t deny this feeling that those words I said triggered a flag.

“This is just what I think, but...at that time, isn’t this what you were saying, Ichirou? ‘Why don’t you already confess that you’re a girl and go out with me?’”

“What?”

“Then, at the classroom, you also said that I didn’t need to talk about it until I wanted to. By that, weren’t you saying ‘I’ll be waiting for as long as it takes’?”

Wrong. Wrong. That’s not it.

If you were reading between the lines, what I meant by that was “I’ll keep silent about it for eternity.”

“Sorry it took so long. But from now on, we’ll always be together.”

“Wait, um.”

“One day, I’ll persuade father and mother. As a legitimate descendant of the Hinomori household, I have to make a child. I have to marry someone anyways. I should be able to make my choice for who my partner will be.”

“Marry...!”

This is dire. This conversation is dire, Ryuuga. I’m repeating myself by saying this, but I’m wondering if this really is just training?!

“France’s Castle of Chambord would be nice.”

“W, what are you talking about?”

“Our honeymoon.”

...Soon after that, I left the Hinomori house while feeling overwhelmed.

When I left the gate, Kyouka, who I came across as she was returning home, said “Would you like to come and have dinner with us?”

She was a girl with a cheerful smile and twintails, but I politely declined her offer. She was still innocent, yet as a younger sister, she had neat looks, similar to Ryuuga.

“I heard about what happened from my sister...no wait, I mean from my brother. Please give Ryuuga happiness, Kobayashi.”

That night, for some reason, I had a dream where a frilled lizard was chasing me to the ends of the earth.

Part 2

After that, Ryuuga and I went on secret dates after school.

Our secret meeting place was basically just Ryuuga's house. That was so we could avoid public attention while she was flirting with me, and also so she could do her fashion shows.

I have to do something—I know I do, but no measures come to mind. On the contrary, when seeing Ryuuga in sailor uniforms, school swimsuits, and miniskirt Santa outfits, I've sort of come to look forward to the cosplay somehow.

Even as a female protagonist, Ryuuga's appeal doesn't change. Actually, I feel like it's increased because of her breasts.

(Not good! I shouldn't allow this! I shouldn't be conscious of Ryuuga as a woman! That's really going to hasten the process of me taking on the boyfriend role! I have to do something before it's too late!)

Such is the result of suffering this and that for several days.

At present, I've decided to enact the "strategy to disillusion Ryuuga and return to our former relationship."

The contents of the strategy are as the name suggests. First, I'll appear as uncool, repulsive, and hopeless in order to disgust Ryuuga. Then afterwards, I'll inch my way back to the position of a friend character...or something like that.

(Just you wait and see, Ryuga. I'll make you realize how despicable and indecent I can be!)

However, there was one big hole in this strategy. When thinking about it carefully, there's the matter of "Isn't that the same as how I was up until this point?"

Sure enough, the strategy failed. It didn't work on Ryuuga.

"Ryuga, pose like a leopardess."

"Sure."

“Ryuga, let me sniff your armpits.”

“Sure.”

“Ryuga, step on me with high heels.”

“Sure.”

No matter how much I kept pushing the envelope, Ryuuga complied. Or rather, she seemed to be enjoying it.

Making no progress with this strategy, I decided to halt since I realized that I was only digging my grave.

(Ah crap...isn't this completely like what a boyfriend would do?! Aren't I like a boyfriend being in high spirits?!)

After having gone this far, I can't say “Let's be good friends,” now. If I said such a thing, I would be as terrible as the “Apostles of Hell.”

Something also worth noting is that the “Apostles of Hell” haven't been appearing recently. Hiding themselves at such times like these...they're completely unforgivable.

Thanks to that, there's been more cosplay scenes than battle scenes.

I definitely want to ask the opinion of the “Dragon God” on this matter.

I want to ask “Your host has been running wild more often than you, is that okay?” Even so, the—

“Don't worry, Ichirou. If it's about Ron, he completely supports me.”

“Gah!”

The “Dragon King” had surrendered already before I even knew it.

Ryuuga's now able to freely act according to her intentions.

Furthermore, he reflects the image of its host and takes on the appearance of a comical chibi dragon during times of peace. He sits cutely on Ryuuga's shoulder, just like a certain electric mouse sitting atop of a boy named Ash.

(What the heck...)

Is it hopeless at this point? At this rate, am I going to have to settle for a semi-

boyfriend position? Am I going to have to take double eyelid surgery? Where the heck is this story heading towards?

Turbulent, dark clouds hung over my mind.

However, at that point in time, I still hadn't reached rock bottom yet.

I never expected that something even worse was waiting for me...it really wasn't something I could have predicted.

It happened on Thursday.

That day, I left the Hinomori residence after doing an "idol chase scene skit" with Ryuuga.

Lamp by lamp, the street lights began to shine, and I was in a barren alley at the evening. I was trudging along with my shoulders slumped over.

...She had flirted plenty with me today as well.

It was about our future child's name, and it developed into a light argument. We ran into conflict when Ryuuga claimed "Any name is fine," while I claimed "It has to be a unique name."

(What am I doing! Isn't this relationship becoming more real?!)

I reprimanded myself while heading home. It's kinda miserable how that's become common for me now.

Should I give up? Should my passion for "friend characters" be just that? Should I apologize to Ishida and the others for having them be test subjects in the past?

(The idea of disillusioning her wasn't bad, it's just that I made a mistake in the means to do so. Ryuga likes the way I've been up until this point, so if I instead turn into a charming, overly serious man...)

While thinking of such things, I approached a small park.

On a bench I could see over the garden fence, one girl sitting there had caught my attention.

"Oh, Yukimiya."

It was the former heroine/candidate, Yukimiya Shiori.

She hadn't returned home yet, and was still in her uniform. Her long hair fluttered in the wind, and it seemed like she was idling while lost in thought.

"...Ah, Kobayashi."

Yukimiya turned over to my direction in reaction to my voice.

Since I ended up letting out a voice, it'd be awkward to just keeping on walking. I reluctantly crossed over the fence and took a roundabout path to Yukimiya.

"What's wrong? You're alone in such a place like th—"

I ceased my words there.

I noticed a stray cat curled up into a ball on her lap.

"A cat?"

"This child injured its hind legs, so I'm healing them."

Yukimiya Shiori, "The Shrine Maiden of Life," is a girl who holds an unusual ability of healing.

Along with her household being ancient, her power is one that's been handed down along the family. However, with it's manifestation being in shrine maidens, the supernatural ability can only happen in girls. It seems that the probability of a user is only one person per generation.

If I remember correctly, Aogasaki's and Elmira's abilities are inherited. It seems that their bloodlines and family lineages may indeed be important for having main characters.

"You give treatment to stray cats? You really are kind, Yukimiya."

"The only thing I can do is support, after all."

Though she was smiling, Yukimiya's words showed signs of self-deprecation. That's not like her normal self.

It's getting more and more difficult to ignore this. Ryuuga doesn't really have sights on Yukimiya, so getting a little involved should be okay.

"This might just be a bad guess, but...are you perhaps bothered by your position during battle?"

“...You’re perceptive, aren’t you, Kobayashi?”

Yukimiya gave another broad smile while petting the stray cat.

As expected of an idol-like existence in the school. Even her bitter smile is very elegant. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that one in five schoolboys would be charmed by her.

There was a silence for a brief while. Eventually, Yukimiya made a small sigh before speaking.

“I’ve got no fighting power compared to Rei, Elmira, and of course, Hinomori. I can more or less strengthen physical ability, but I can’t hold out on my own against something at the level of an apostle...so in battles, I often just assist.”

Come to think of it, that’s how it was when they were fighting the octopus apostle at the riverbed. Despite how it looks, I think she plays an indispensable role, though.

“So, I’ve been thinking about it recently. I’m wondering if I’m even useful. Or maybe I’m just holding everyone back.”

“Yukimiya, you can weaken the movements of the apostles, right?”

“Even if I don’t use that power, everyone can still beat the apostles. Hinomori can even heal by himself...I don’t even have to be there...”

Yukimiya hunched over, just like the stray cat sleeping on her lap.

...I see. So she’s in turmoil as well about her own position, about her role.

I don’t think I can push this aside as someone else’s problem. I really want to encourage her now.

“Look, Yukimiya. Isn’t it that Ryuuga and the others can win against any kind of apostle because they can concentrate solely of offense?”

“.....”

“Doesn’t it mean that if you’re there when they get injured, they can feel a large sense of security?”

“But, if it’s about healing, then Hinomori can do that too.”

“Ryuga’s healing isn’t as good as yours. Furthermore, there’s the chanting to

focus on. The other day, Ryuga told me ‘I have to concentrate to heal. It creates a weak point, so I don’t want to use it at all if possible.’”

It’s true. Even Ryuuga has her strengths and weaknesses, and healing is the ability she’s weakest at...she told me that with a serious face. She was wearing gym bloomers at the time as well.

“Listen, Yukimiya. Each person has their own role. There’s no need for you to be on the front lines. So you don’t need to go fighting. “Battle strength” and “battle ability” are not the same thing.”

“But...”

“Your companions can fight without worrying about injuries because you’re there in the back. Also, when ordinary people get dragged in, they can entrust things to you. In other words, you, Yukimiya Shiori—support Ryuga and the others by “healing” not just in a physical sense, but also in a mental sense by giving them ‘peace of mind!’”

‘What am I doing’...is what I said in my mind, but Yukimiya silently listened to my speech.

“Be confident, Yukimiya. You’re “The Shrine Maiden of Life”...you’re blessed with life, you’re a user of an compassionate ability. Isn’t that a wonderful power?”

“Kobayashi...”

“Don’t make light of the sub-roles. There are people who value you highly. At the very least, there’s one right here.”

Then, Yukimiya suddenly burst into laughter.

Did I go overboard on my fervent speech? I start to get really passionate when it comes to talking about supporting roles. In the first place, she’s a main character, so I suppose that it’d be natural if she wanted to participate more actively.

“Sorry, Yukimiya. It seems I talked a bit too mu—”

“Even Hinomori didn’t say something like that to me.”

“Wha?”

Yukimiya unexpectedly made a reply, causing me to let out a weird voice.

At that moment, the stray cat abruptly got up. It pounced out of Yukimiya's lap and darted off.

"Ha ha. It seems that child got better, just like I did."

Yukimiya got up from the bench and stared straight at me.

Judging by her refreshed expression, it seems that the encouragement was a success, but...something about the atmosphere feels off. It sort of feels like some kind of romantic background music would be playing right about now, for instance.

"Thank you, Kobayashi. You're right. I have my own role...thanks to you, I can keep going from tomorrow."

"O, oh. How nice."

"My perception of you has greatly changed."

"No. You're just being delusional."

"I don't think so. I understand why Hinomori trusts you now. It seems like you're a much better person than I am at support."

"Um, well then, I think I'll be heading..."

"If you don't mind, could I come to you for advice in the future?"

While bowing, Yukimiya just said something outrageous. She's a shrine maiden that doesn't normally listen to what people say.

"Kobayashi, your words have a marvelous philanthropic power to them. Surely that comes from a heart of compassion...just like what the source of my power comes from, a pure spirit."

"T, that's not it..."

Not good. I was carried away and got too involved. I'm digging my grave even further!

"H, hold on Yukimiya. You're just exhausted."

"I look forward to your support and encouragement from now on. However,

I'd like to keep these talks between us a secret if you can...I don't want everyone to think that I'm weak."

"I don't want in on this! I don't want to be a part of this!"

"If it's you, it'll be fine, Kobayashi. I feel like I don't need to be shy with you, and I can talk about anything. I wonder—what's happening to me?"

Yukimiya's cheeks took on a slightly crimson color.

Hey! You're being a bit too easy to get! Your fans will decrease! You're supposed to support the mentality of your companions and yet, you're tearing away at my mentality!

(This is dangerous. At this rate, the number of people I'm holding secret meetings with will increase...!)

I'm going to be keeping secrets not only with Ryuuga, but also with Yukimiya. I won't be able to hit the brakes with how much I'm steering off-course. Ryuuga might dig me a grave.

What do I do? Should I try saying "Breasts are the best! Yahoo!" while jumping up and down? Would that not break my flag with Yukimiya?

No, that wouldn't do. Right now I'm "the female protagonist's semi-boyfriend." At least, during this period, I shouldn't rashly commit acts of perversion.

Just like last time...it seems I have to go with a change in course once more.

"Say, Yukimiya. I suppose we can't act like what occurred just now never happened, right?"

"Nope. You're already my exclusive advisor now."

"Don't you have Sebastian!"

"Sebastian has been taking time off since last week because of abdominal pain."

"You definitely fed him something! Anyways, I'm not one to give people advice!"

"Of course, I know that this is a selfish request. So as an apology and as

gratitude, I'll give you my own special beef stroganoff, Kobayashi."

"That's what's causing Sebastian's abdominal pain!"

"But, I won't let you eat me. Hee hee."

"Stop it! I'm a bit worried about that wickedness from you!"

After that, Yukimiya, having forcibly obtained my cellphone number and email address, left with light steps while in high spirits.

As for me, I sat at the bench she was just at and was at a loss for a while.

(How did things turn out this way...)

The situation got worse. Ryuuga was already giving me a headache, but now a compassionate ability user is going to mercilessly trouble me as well.

In front of my feeble line of sight was the stray cat leisurely washing its face.

Part 3

Since the next day, contrary to my worries, Yukimiya fortunately didn't call for me.

It seems that there aren't any matters worrying her for the time being, and she's only sent me one email. However, the contents of it were quite alarming, since she wrote "You appeared in my dream last night."

The classroom I'm in is different than the one Yukimiya goes to. If I make sure that we don't come across each other, I should be able to pull through for the time being...

My urgent task at present is to correct my relationship with Ryuuga.

I have to somehow disillusion Ryuuga and demote my current position.

At the very least, I want her to think 'Ichirou might be a bit unsuited for a boyfriend role.'

(My guess is that the type Ryuuga likes is the "no-good man" kind. In that case, perhaps I really should shift into the serious, cool type...it would be a complete change in character, though.)

—As a test, I tried parting my hair to the side.

However, it ended in failure. I only got loud laughs from Ryuuga.

—Next, I tried wearing glasses like an honor student.

That also backfired. Ryuuga said "Seeing you in glasses gives me a different kind of heart-pounding feeling."

—Not being discouraged, I tried being cool by coming to class with a rose in my mouth.

That was also in vain. When I was called on for a problem, I couldn't speak because of the rose, and I ended up in the staff room.

(In the end, I just made a fool out of myself...this is difficult.)

Going along with my trial-and-error, it was already after school on the

weekend.

Today, another fashion show and skit at the Hinomori household was awaiting...or so I thought, but Ryuuga surprisingly said that we'd have to cancel it.

I was told that her younger sister, Kyouka, caught a fever, and that she wanted to take care of her.

"Sorry, Ichirou. But, I'm really worried about Kyouka..."

"Don't worry. Just focus on Kyouka for now. And, if possible, I also want you to cool down as well."

"But the bunny girl costume finally arrived..."

"Bunny? N, no, it can't be like that, okay? We shouldn't hang out until Kyouka's fully recovered."

"Yeah, you're right...Father and Mother aren't here, so I have to be the one by her side."

I knew this long ago already, but Ryuuga's a girl that's very affectionate towards her younger sister. And Kyouka is a girl that's very affectionate towards her older sister. Above all, she's one of the few who knows about the secret behind Ryuuga's gender.

Even when they were small, they've never once fought. Since they grew up in a special environment, it seems that they've grown some strong bonds. Though, it would've been better if they weren't two sisters, but a brother-sister pair...

(At any rate, I've unexpectedly become free for the weekend.)

I'm a bit worried about Kyouka, but the only thing I can probably do is to go and send a get-well letter. First and foremost, I have to worry about myself. I can never loosen my guard.

Finals for the first semester will arrive soon, and when that's over, summer vacation will come.

Spending the summer while having my current relationship with Ryuuga is very dangerous.

During the summer, women become more open...and if Ryuuga says “I want to go further with this training,” I’m not confident that I’d be able to refuse. Our current distance is very dangerous.

Recently, I’ve had some unease. Could Ryuuga actually be serious about this...?

Then came Sunday.

I left my house in the morning, and decided to step foot in the neighboring town by taking a train.

There’s no particular aim for me being here. Strictly speaking, it’s because I want to be in a place with no acquaintances and slowly think about what measures to take.

The weather’s been fine since the morning, and the temperature is just right. I’d been thinking that instead of idling about at home, being in an unfamiliar environment would be a refreshing change of pace.

(Should I try getting off at Susuhama station? Since there are few people there, the cafe near the station should likely be open.)

For caution’s sake, I left my cellphone at home. I’ll pretend that I just forgot it. I plan to return right when noon passes, so not having it shouldn’t be an issue.

—After arriving at Susuhama station, I headed straight towards the cafe and ordered a iced milk coffee.

I would have been nice to get a sandwich, but I gave up on that since they only had cakes and cookies. Fancy cafes from foreign companies are inconvenient in this way.

(However, there are more customers than I thought...it’s a Sunday, after all.)

Receiving my iced milk coffee at the register, I made my way to a seat in the corner of the bustling store. The front of the cafe was a big glass window, so I could see an unbroken view of the scenery outside.

(I wonder what Ryuga is doing at around this time.)

Of course, she’s probably taking care of Kyouka.

Unfortunately, healing abilities only have an effect on injuries. Even if Yukimiya was there, she wouldn't be able to cure illnesses.

(It's her we're talking about, so I'm sure she'll gallantly take care of Kyouka.)

...When I try to imagine that, Ryuuga in a bunny girl costume pops up for some reason. Then she'd also add "-pyon" to the end of her sentences. (TLN: Adding -pyon to the end makes a sentence more "cute")

(I wonder if she'd properly put on a bunny-eared headband. Perhaps a fluffy, round tail as well. Ryuuga has a pretty nice rear, so...)

At that moment, I came to my senses, and was stunned.

What was I thinking about just now? Why am I grinning? Why are my nostrils flaring?

Maybe my subconscious accepted myself as "Ryuuga's boyfriend?" Do I want to dress up as a hunter and chase after Ryuuga in a bunny costume?

(No! I want to go back to being a friend character! I want to disillusion Ryuga!)

While clawing at my own head, I downed the iced milk coffee in one gulp like it was a shot of alcohol.

—Then one woman sat on the seat next to me.

It seems that was the only seat open since the number of customers increased. She was slender, tall, and quite the beauty with huge breasts.

(She kind of looks like a celebrity...)

Judging from appearances, she might be a college student. She had a somewhat stylish figure with a chiffon dress and a thin black cardigan. She had a barrette on the back of her hair and wore sleek black sunglasses.

Peeking out of her bag was a fashion magazine with a foreign fashion model on the front cover. Perhaps this person is also a fashion model. She elegantly sat while crossing her legs and looked neat.

(Is she waiting for her boyfriend? I wonder what kind of guy this person would go out with. A medical school student? A young businessman?)

When thinking about such things, the person suddenly caught a glimpse of

me. Then—

“!”

For some reason, she gasped and her face turned stiff.

“K, Kobayashi!”

“Huh?”

Her voice sounded familiar to me.

Surprisingly, it matched with a person I knew quite well.

Leaning forward, I saw that her face looked as if she was in distress. When she stood up from her chair, I had finished confirming her identity.

“Aogasaki?”

“Hyaa!”

“Aogasaki, right?”

“Y, y, you’re mistaken!”

She quickly shakes her head. At the same time, her huge breasts are swinging.

“No, you’re Aogasaki. You just called me Kobayashi.”

“I don’t know you! I don’t know you at all!”

“Then take off those sunglasses.”

“I refuse! I’m to never take off these sunglasses in public!”

“You’re not Tamori.” *(TLN: Tamori is a Japanese TV celebrity known for wearing black sunglasses.)*

“Anyways, I’m not this ‘Aogasaki Rei’ person you’re talking about! My character is completely different from hers!”

“First off, calm down a bit. Everyone’s watching.”

Noticing the gaze from the surrounding guests, she reluctantly sat back down on the chair.

After that, she resigned herself and took the glasses off, setting them aside on the table. Looking at her almond-shaped eyes, it was indeed Aogasaki.

“So, what are you doing like that?”

“...Nothing in particular.”

“Are you meeting someone?”

“...I’m here alone.”

“The atmosphere around you is different from usual, so I didn’t recognize you until you spoke.”

“Perhaps you want to say that something like this doesn’t suit me.”

There, Aogasaki glared at me with a pretty hateful gaze.

“I suppose you’re laughing in your mind at seeing me like this.”

“No, not really.”

“Hmph. Go ahead and laugh if you want.”

For some reason, Aogasaki is pouting. She’s puffing her cheeks like a child would, and she’s violently stirring her iced coffee with a straw.

...After the other day with Yukimiya, I had a hunch that I was going to stumble upon another “unusual matter” with a heroine.

“I know it already. I’m an archaic, stoical swordswoman...my outfit would be a kendo uniform, and my favorite book would be Miyamoto Musashi’s ‘*The Book of Five Rings*,’ and I’m a sword-freak that on holidays, only practices swinging a weapon at the dojo. At least, that’s probably what you think.”

(TLN: Miyamoto Musashi is a Japanese swordsman and philosopher. ‘*The Book of Five Rings*’ is a text he wrote on martial arts and Japanese swordsmanship.)

“T, that’s not what I thought.”

“That’s a lie. I completely know what you’re thinking.”

Resting one hand on her chin, Aogasaki made a pout with her lips.

Even though I went out of my town so that I wouldn’t meet an acquaintance, trouble has decided to come my way.

“I have an interest in clothing, accessories, and cosmetics. I listen to Western music, and I collect stuffed animals. Is that bad? Is it?”

She drew so close that the tips of our noses were touching. This time, I'm the one that's quickly shaking my head now.

I'm glad she doesn't have her wooden sword right now. However, Aogasaki is "The Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance"...she can clad any rod-shaped object in void, possibly turning it into a lethal weapon.

So just in case, I nonchalantly confiscated the straw in her iced coffee.

"I can...totally do it. Does this place have some shochu?" (*TLN: Shochu is a Japanese liquor. It's stronger than wine/sake, but weaker than whiskey.*)

"Aogasaki, you're a minor so don't drink alcohol. You're not that kind of character."

"Hmph. I don't need to keep up appearances anymore. At least, not to you, Kobayashi."

After that, Aogasaki started grumbling, and according to her—the real her is very susceptible to fads, she likes being stylish, which in others words, means she's a fashionista.

Though, she's worried about the image she makes of herself towards her surroundings, so she tries not to let people see her. I thought she'd be the type to just go along with it, but it looks like she's able to key into her surroundings quite well.

"Let me say this, Kobayashi, you hold one end of the responsibility."

"Huh?"

"Every time you see me, you always make a fuss about me being a 'beautiful swordswoman' or something of that sort. Because of that, I've been gradually becoming established as that kind of character. I've been getting more than thirty love-letters from just Oumei High School's girls now."



Indeed, there are many girls who admire Aogasaki. If Yukimiya is the idol of

the boys, I suppose it'd be right to say that Aogasaki is the idol of the girls.

I can't deny the fact that I played a role in that happening.

"As you said, I do hold some liability in this matter. Let me apologize."

"Before you do that, why don't you apologize for the matter of that peeping you did?"

"No, that...at that point in time, it was an event I had to do, I guess..."

"An event you had to do? Ryuuga didn't seem that interested in it."

"It was important for me, at least. Please understand just that."

For a short while, Aogasaki pondered and said "Hmm..." while crossing her arms.

"...In other words, you went that far so you could see me without clothes?"

"Yeah. Or perhaps I should say that rather than wanting to see you like that, I wanted to perform the act of looking..."

"In other words—you a sense a charm in me as a woman?"

Aogasaki turned the conversation towards a strange direction. Her facial expression was still one of displeasure, but within it, there were some faint glimmers of joy that appeared and disappeared.

While I was thinking about how suspicious that was, Aogasaki corrected her sitting posture and unnaturally cleared her throat with a cough.

"B, by the way, Kobayashi."

"What?"

"I'm only asking this for reference, but...what do you think of these clothes?"

"Let's see, I think it suits you pretty well. Your taste in color is good, making the frills on the chest area a high point of the outfit."

"I know, right! I liked these frills, so I bought them!"

"The Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance" finally let out a joy without hesitation. Her eyes sparkled as if this was a topic she enjoyed.

"Well then, how's this barrette? Should I have picked a color that stands out

more?”

“What about brown? You have pretty hair, so people nearby would be attracted to it.”

“I, I see...”

“Something like a ribbon might work well. You have an adult-like aura, so it could help as an accent. However, the color would need to be chic. How about moss green?”

“Uh-huh...well, then how about these—”

We continued talking about the enigmas of fashion for nearly an hour.

Aogasaki fired questions one after another, and eventually took out a notepad. When I realized it, I was already on my fourth cup of iced milk coffee.

...I was supposed to be here to apologize. I guess this is how I make amends to her. If Aogasaki is happy, I suppose it's fine.

However, as for the result—I once again dug my own grave even further.

“Kobayashi, I never thought that you were this well-versed in fashion.”

“No, I'm not that well-versed in it...”

“There hasn't been anyone I've talked who's gotten me this excited. I definitely want to meet up again at this place in the future.”

“Um...”

“That's it! How about becoming my exclusive coordinator?”

I knew that I was turning pale at that point.

I went and did it again! I triggered another pointless flag! Now I'm going to take the role of an exclusive coordinator along with being an exclusive advisor!

I had experience from being the fashion leader in Komiyama's class, but I went and pointlessly used it here...!

“Hey, Kobayashi. Let me ask you one more time. Is me being like this... strange?”

“N, not really...”

“Really? Those words aren’t a lie?”

“Usually, strong-minded youths have that kind of side to them, after all...”

I very much know a certain girl that normally dresses as man but likes cosplay.

“Then I have a request, let me able to consult you about these things! I can’t talk with other people about this, and it seems that my hobbies match with yours!”

“You’d probably be better off consulting Ryuuga rather than...”

“T, that’s foolish! I can’t let Ryuuga see me like this! It would be embarrassing! I wouldn’t be able to face him properly!”

Aogasaki turns red, covers her face with both hands, and shakes her head. It’s good that she has some gap moe, but...I didn’t want to encounter her like this.

“Kobayashi, could you accompany me to the shop next time? I want you to help me with picking clothes.”

“No, you’d probably be better off going to that sword exhibition with Ryuuga or...”

“I’m not interested in those sorts of things.”

Not interested, she says?

“So, give me your cellphone number and email address! I’ll get in touch with you again!”

...With this and that happening, once I was finally out of her clutches, it was already evening.

In the end, I couldn’t devise any measures against Ryuuga, increasing the amount of pains in the neck.

(I want to change schools or something like that now...)

I don’t remember too well how I got back home. I had already collapsed onto my bed when I realized it.

When I looked at my cellphone near the pillow, I had received three messages. They were from Ryuuga, Yukimiya, and Aogasaki.

‘To Ichirou. It’s about Kyouka’s condition. She’s gotten a lot better! Please expect the bunny cosplay soon!’

‘To Kobayashi. Sebastian was discharged from the hospital. I want to try baking macarons as a celebration, but what do you think, Kobayashi?’

‘To Kobayashi. Thank you for today. I won’t let you see me nude, but a bikini would be okay. It’s embarrassing, so I would wear a pareo.’

I replied “I look forward to it” to all of them.

I’m already at the end of my rope.

Part 4

I'm not some kind of idiot.

With all these heroine flags I've gathered up until this point, there's one more person that I should be worried about. Of course, that would be Elmira McCartney.

Now that it's not only Ryuuga, but also Yukimiya Shiori and Aogasaki Rei that I've been holding secrets with, I'm shuddering in fear over that vampire. I never want anything to do with her. I don't even want her to approach within a five meter radius.

(Kyouka's fever seems to have gotten better, but she's still being nursed and is absent from school...once she fully recovers, Ryuga's cosplay show will reopen.)

Before that, I have to displease Ryuuga by any means possible. I have to become a serious character.

I've already tossed my secret notebook, the one about the three sizes of girls, into the shredder. I've also thrown away my lewd books and lewd DVDs, and I've also erased the lewd pictures in my hard drive.

I have to immediately establish myself as a "clean Kobayashi."

"Perverted conduct" and "getting involved with Elmira"...those two are absolutely taboo.

"Wait a minute, Kobayashi Ichirou."

However, the chains of fate didn't let me go.

It was after school on Tuesday. I was trying to head towards the bookstore to buy some books on law, which would serve as honor student character props. About ten minutes after heading out of the school gates, a voice called to me from behind.

It was the vampire with deep crimson hair and a low blood pressure.

"Gah, Elmira!"

“‘Gah,’ is how you greet me? I thought that I’d be generous and give you some advice.”

With an irritated expression, Elmira briskly walks over to me.

Along with her steps was her flame-like, medium-long hair that swayed around. Even though she wore her Oumei High School uniform loosely, she had a noble-like, high-class feel to her.

As one of the three major characters, she’s very charming, but her beauty is also rivaled by Aogasaki’s and Yukimiya’s.

“A, advice?”

“Right. Some advice. Actually, I wonder if ‘advice’ is the right way to put it.”

Perhaps Elmira’s noticed that I’ve been getting more acquainted with the other two former heroines/candidates? Did she come here say “If you keep doing that, I’ll drag you into hell,” and warn me?

I shouldn’t make light of a non-human. It’s possible that she’s suspecting me of the slight interactions I’ve had with Yukimiya and Shiori. Though, she probably doesn’t know the part about Ryuuga being a woman...

“W, wait, Elmira. It’s not what you think. I never wanted this!”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

Elmira tilted her head to the side while looking perplexed.

Oh, was I wrong? She didn’t come here to give me the yellow card?

Not minding my confusion, Elmira pointed forwards. Since I was facing towards her, from my point of view, she was pointing towards my back.

“Kobayashi Ichirou. Stop walking on this path.”

“Huh?”

“I sense a discomforting ill will beyond this point. There’s something seeping out from hell—a dark, cloudy miasma.”

So in other words, it’s an “Apostle of Hell,” I suppose.

The peculiarities have been remarkably silent lately, but could they be waiting

just up ahead?

“E, Elmira. If that’s true, shouldn’t we call for Ryuga and the others?”

“Ryuuga is in the middle of taking care of his sister. The ill will up ahead doesn’t seem to be that strong of an apostle. Arbitrarily calling in everyone doesn’t seem...oh?”

There, Elmira slightly shrugged her shoulders.

“It’s coming this way as we’re speaking.”

“Huh?!”

Looking over my shoulder in a panic, sure enough, a single man came walking this way.

He was a young man with a suit. Judging from appearances, he only seems like a typical company employee. However...

(There’s more to it. That’s not a human...I’m not quite sure why I think so, but I’m not mistaken here.)

As the man draws closer, an indescribable feeling of oppression grew stronger.

For some reason, the back of my neck feels hot. There’s a buzzing in my ears. I can’t breathe the way I want. Before I knew it, my whole body began to sweat.

Thinking about it, this was the first time I’ve faced an apostle at so close a proximity.

“A pleasure to meet you, Apostle. It’s quite admirable that you came all the way here to get knocked down.”

Elmira stepped forward to try and protect me. As expected, even if she’s rotten, she’s still a main character. She’s a vampire of justice that would protect an ordinary citizen.

Following that, the man stopped his feet at a distance of around five meters from us.

He observed us with his emotionless eyes for a brief moment. He seemed like a carnivore evaluating some prey.

“—Shidora.”

Soon, the man introduced himself. For some reason, these “Apostles of Hell” have a biker gang-like naming sense. (*TLN: The kanji characters in Shidora’s name directly translate to ‘Thin Death Ballista.’ Ow the edge.*)

“Remember it. It’s the name of the one that will consume you!”

In the next moment, the man’s body expanded.

With a billowing sound, his suit tore as he morphed into a large build of three meters that was covered in hair. A pair of fangs pointed upwards and reached from his mouth to his ears. Although he stood on two feet, he was an apostle that seemed like a wild boar.

The apostle’s roar echoed throughout the unpopulated alley.

“Elmira McCartney! You’re a foolish girl that allies with humans despite being a non-human! I’ve been waiting for you to be alone!”

“Did you think I would be beaten by a single being? It seems you’re making light of me.”

Elmira’s scarlet hair began to wave. At the same time,

I felt another strong pressure against my body. It far surpasses that of the apostle’s, and furthermore, there was a fighting spirit(?) that carried traces of blazes.

(S, she really isn’t a human!)

The surrounding temperature instantly rose. The air warped from the heat, the blowing wind turned hot like a hairdryer. My bag turned piping hot like a steamed bun.

...This is Elmira’s battle mode.

Were you this overwhelming? You weren’t just a sleepy character?

“Guh, what an aura...who knew that ‘The Blood-kin of Eternal Darkness’ was this dangerous of an existence...!”

I and the wild boar apostle both flinched.

It’s good that she revealed her true character with vigor, but her expression

was already losing its composure. Did I misinterpret Elmira's power?

"Shidora, is that how you say it? I will now pass judgement onto you."

Elmira slowly walked.

"I see. Perhaps your sentence will be death by fire. With my hellfire, I'll roast you until you're well-done. I'll burn..."

Then, at that moment, Elmira unsteadily staggers left and right.

Next, her knees lose their balance, and she topples onto the ground. The blazes and the pressure she had emitted rapidly vanished.

"E, Elmira?! What's wrong?!"

"T, this is bad..."

"What is?"

"I don't have enough blood...come to think of it, I didn't absorb any from Ryuuga recently..."

"Wha...!"

What the heck. Elmira is out of fuel at such a time!

Blood is the energy source of her flames. She can effortlessly resupply by sucking blood, but Ryuuga prohibited her from doing that. Ryuuga told her "You can suck my blood instead."

Elmira's following that agreement, so she probably could only have supplied energy using her own blood. And now, when trying to bring out a large fire, caused a state of anemia to happen to her.

(All because I kept monopolizing Ryuga...)

Despite Ryuuga being who she is, it seems she forgot to let Elmira suck her blood. She was so engrossed in me, it seems that she overlooked the need to resupply Elmira.

Don't tell me the negative effects of me straying away from my character would manifest like this.

"M, Mwahaha...what's wrong? You're the 'The Blood-kin of Eternal

Darkness.'"

Inferring the situation, Shidora instantly regained his spirit. Talk about an apostle that's all talk.

"It seems that you're in a bad shape. I could easily kill your current form!"

"K, Kobayashi Ichirou...run away."

Elmira gasps hard to say that while not even being able to stand up.

"I can buy a bit of time...so in the meantime, run off to find Ryuuga..."

That's not good. If I do that, Elmira will be killed, and I'll be the indirect cause of that.

(I can't do that. This guy isn't even all that tough, he's supposed get buried by the main characters!)

As I was thinking of such, my body already moved on its own.

I quickly sent Ryuuga a message, then ran off from my location. In a reversal of the situation just now, I stand in front of Elmira to protect her and face the apostle.

"W, what are you doing Kobayashi Ichirou. Quickly, get out of here...!"

"Leave this to me!"

I rejected Elmira's proposal and glared straight at the apostle.

The distance between us was only a little under two meters. To be honest, it was not a riveting feeling. Even if twenty delinquents surrounded me, I wouldn't feel as nervous as I am now.

"What are you up to? Do you want me to consume you first?"

Shidora looked down at me with his wicked eyes.

I'm getting cold feet. Right now, I'm "the female protagonist's semi-boyfriend." While I'm at it, I'm also a heroine's advisor and a heroine's coordinator.

I can't afford to make a unsightly display of myself here. I am a pro co-star... and until I return to being a friend character, I'll operate under this role with all

of my might!

“You humans have sufficient courage. However, reality does not turn out as they would wish!”

“I’ll make it turn out as I wish!”

As Shidora was talking with his large mouth, I lunged at him.

I then tossed my school bag into his mouth.

“Mmgaah!”

The apostle was slightly surprised by the unexpected attack of an ordinary citizen. I made use of the opportunity—

I quickly turned back and ran away as fast I could while holding Elmira in my arms. This makes it the second time I’ve done a princess carry to someone, the first time being with Ryuuga.

Elmira and Shidora went “Wha?!” in unison. Time to flee. There’s no reason for me to go against him up front!

“W, wait Kobayashi Ichirou. What are you planning?!”

Elmira is puzzled while in my arms. It was fortunate that she was lighter than I thought.

“You saw what I did! This is a retreat, a retreat!”

“Are you going to neglect the apostle?”

“I’m not letting him go unchecked! A certain someone is going to knock him down! He’ll knock him down for you, Elmira!”

“Say, what’s with your leg strength...”

While doing this and that, the gap between Shidora and I opened up.

I can’t have a peace of mind with just this much, though. As evidence of that, I felt an ill will from behind me shortly afterwards. I have to speed up.

(He’s a wild boar apostle. His strength is in charging forward, but he should be weak at swerving...so to run away, I’ll need to zig-zag as much as I can!)

To break free of the pursuit, I kept turning left and right on the road. I kicked

my way up a short concrete wall, jumped over a wire mesh, and sprinted across the railing of a fence.

“Y, you are not human! Your speed is ridiculously—”

In the far distance, I heard Shidora yell something from behind.

However, I soon couldn't hear his voice anymore.

Part 5

Taking a corner, I had rushed into an abandoned factory.

It had been neglected for many years, the equipment had already been removed, and the interior rattled. The windows were nearly fractured, and all four sides of the building were made of dreary concrete...I had once peeked at Ryuuga and the others during a battle here.

“huff...With this, we should have some additional time now.”

I lower Elmira onto the ground and sit in front of her. I had been sprinting for a little under five minutes, so my breathing pace didn't really increase.

Shidora will probably arrive here soon. That's my hypothesis. Or rather, I hadn't planned to completely throw him off from the beginning.

“...Kobayashi Ichirou.”

While exhausted on the floor, Elmira faintly called out to me.

Her anemia seems to be getting much better, but her complexion still looks just as bad. The vigor that's normally in her eyes and voice is gone.

“What is it, Elmira?”

“Who in the world...are you?”

“What do you mean?”

“How are you able to have such...superhuman movements?”

“I think those were just normal.”

“Go review the definition of normal.”

Elmira had jumped at me, but soon fell over in exhaustion. The uniform of her skirt was flipped up, and her white thighs were visible.

“It's just my reflexes that are good. Anyways, let's get started.”

“O, on what?”

“I've decided.”

I approached Elmira, and helped her sit up straight.

While supporting her on one arm, I used the hand on my other arm to remove the buttons on my collared shirt, starting from the top button.

“W, w, what are you planning to start? Stop it, not at a time like this!”

Elmira started losing her composure.

I didn't know she had this kind of side to her. Doesn't it make for quite the nice gap moe?

“I've never been seen like this! I've never even kissed before—”

“Absorb it, Elmira.”

While she was in a panic, I pointed at the nape of my neck while speaking to her.

Elmira stared in confusion while saying “Huh?” Then, once she inferred my aim, she soon stopped her resistance.

“You mean...you want me to absorb your blood?”

“Yeah. It'll probably be pretty unsavory compared to Ryuuga's, but please bear with it just for today.”

We don't have the leisure to dawdle about. If I supply Elmira with blood, she'll be able to fight.

“B, but, I'm not supposed to suck blood from people other than Ryuuga.”

“This is an emergency right now. If Ryuuga gets angry from this, I'll lecture him.”

“.....”

“This is not just to help you, but to also save my own hide. Right now, there's no one other than you that can take down that apostle. You don't want the both of us to die, do you?”

“...I understand.”

After a few seconds of hesitation, Elmira nodded.

Her slender arms clung around my neck. Then, I heard her whisper something

into my ear.

“In that case—thank you for the meal.”



Shortly after, I felt a stinging pain course through my neck.

However, the pain was only at first. Then followed a ticklish sensation from her tongue. The blistering feeling on the wound gradually began to diminish.

So this is what a vampire's bloodsucking is like...despite the current situation, it's a bit of a strange feeling.

"Ngh...ngh."

In an open room with a dim light, a man and woman were clinging to each other.

However, some dubious sounds of slurping and sucking could also be heard.

"Ngh...nngh?"

Then, for some reason, Elmira's absorption became intense. Gradually, my vision started flickering. These are the symptoms of anemia.

"Oh, it's tasty. Perhaps more than Ryuuga's..."

"U, um, Elmira...isn't that enough already?"

"This isn't sufficient."

Elmira sunk her teeth into the nape of my neck once more.

Now, the modest sucking sounds had changed into hearty gulping noises.

"Hey! That's enough! My consciousness is fading!"

"You still seem lively though. Ah, this mild texture, this refreshing feeling...it's light with a clean finish. How raw and first-rate!"

"This isn't beer!"

"Do you have any snacks!"

"This isn't beer!"

In contrast to me getting dizzy, Elmira was rapidly becoming energetic.

Not good. At this rate, I won't die from Shidora, but from Elmira! I didn't think she'd be this much of a heavy drinker...err, heavy bloodsucker.

—At that moment,

Ten meters ahead of us, a concrete wall suddenly burst with an explosion.

“!”

With a thunderous roar, the interior of the factory trembled. Then, emerging from the gaping-wide opening was...as expected, the wild boar peculiarity.

“So after our game of tag was a game of hide-and-seek, it seems. Though, that ends here.”

With a villainous smile, Shidora quickly approached.

However, Elmira still stuck to my neck, even at this late in the game. Her back was facing the apostle.

“Elmira! He’s here! Shidora’s here! Shidora’s behind you!”

I was frantically screaming, but Elmira didn’t stop her bloodsucking. What’s with this heavy drinker!

“I’ll go ahead and send both of your corpses to Hinomori Ryuuga. Though, you may show up as a pulpy mess!”

After declaring so, Shidora kicked the ground. He then charged forward like a bull.

The situation was getting really dire—all the cells in my body were facing a crisis of death. And then,

“Ngh?”

Shidora suddenly slammed on the brakes. He stopped right in front of us and looked this way while seeming puzzled.

His line of sight wasn’t on Elmira.

It was towards the worthless, powerless, ordinary citizen.

“.....”

“.....”

In an open room with a dim light, a man and woman were clinging to each other, and a wild boar apostle was just staring.

Such a surreal scene seemed to have lasted for ten seconds. Before long, Shidora grumbled “Hmm...” while faintly tilting his head.

“...Um, something happen?”

A bit perplexed, I timidly asked him a question.

However, Shidora kept staring at me with a serious look. He then dexterously stoked my chin with his pig feet-like hands.

...What the heck is going on? What’s the reason for this strange happenstance?

I was hesitating on calling out to him again, but then Shidora opened his mouth at last.

“I didn’t notice it earlier...”

“Huh?”

“There’s a presence that you’re emitting right now.”

“W, what?”

“This might be my imagination, but perhaps you...”

“Like I said, what?”

“No, that can’t be...but, hmm...”

Wait.

Wait wait wait.

Don’t say anything indicative! Don’t trigger any unnecessary flags!

(I’m begging you, stop it! Don’t make my position even more complicated! I’ve already got my hands full with many ordeals!) I already feel like I’ve triggered a flag with Elmira.

If I get involved with the “Apostles of Hell” on top of all that, I won’t be able to bring my position under control. I mean, it wouldn’t be strange if I was the final boss at this point.

I was at a complete loss.

I suddenly heard Elmira whisper something.

“Flamed Dance—Rondo”

With those words as a cue, Shidora burst into flames.

A ring of fire had suddenly sprouted, engulfing the apostle's large build.

"Gya, gyaaaaah!"

Shidora was screaming. At the same time, Elmira stood up and finally turned towards the apostle.

Her hair rustled and waved. Then her red lips said a few more brief words.

"Flamed Dance—Rhapsody"

This time, the flames spun into a whirlpool as if they had a mind of their own, and coiled around the enemy like a snake would.

"Gugaaaah! S, stop!"

Shidora raised a shriek while struggling, and I was doing the same in my mind as well.

Stop it, Elmira! Wait a bit before you defeat him! The matter about me still hasn't been resolved!

"Heh heh heh, what a nice plead you're making. There was some delay, but here's your death by fire."

However, Elmira ignored my pressing circumstance. With a sadistic smile, she operated the flames like she was a conductor.

(At this rate, Shidora's going to die...I have to stop her before that! I need to stop this sadistic vampire!)

I rushed over to Elmira at that very moment.

Her hands immediately stopped moving. In response, the flames lost their energy, and eventually vanished.

Ah, what a relief. Elmira stopped what she was doing...at least I thought, but I was merely jumping to conclusions.

"—This ends here, 'Apostle of Hell.'"

Before I knew it, a single boy stood behind Shidora.

The boy wore a uniform that was a bit too big, had androgynous-like features,

and had a small build. His whole body was emitting a cold killing intent as he silently stared at the apostle that had been burnt black.

I don't need to explain who this is.

That person is the protagonist of this story, the one who hosts the "Dragon King," but is actually a girl with a bit of love on her mind—Hinomori Ryuuga.

"Ryu, Ryuga..."

Quite unfortunately, I was the one that brought her here.

Before fleeing while carrying Elmira, I sent Ryuuga a message. I told her to come to the abandoned factory.

That was only some insurance in the event of a crisis. I had planned on having Elmira fight after resupplying her with blood.

In no way did I expect Ryuuga to rush here so quickly.

In no way did I expect Shidora to make that significant observation.

"Ryuuga. I'll leave the rest of it to you."

Elmira held her skirt and respectfully bowed. She stopped her attack so that she could hand the finishing blow over to the protagonist.

"Apostle. How dare you lay your hands on my Ichirou...err, my companions!"

Ryuuga said that bluntly with a cold voice. Her eyes shined gold.

This is bad. She's super-furious. She's seriously angry...I'm sure that I definitely don't have the ability to restrain Ryuuga. I mean, who else would "my Ichirou" be referring to?

"You've incurred my wrath—disappear!"

Shidora's body spun around in the air as Ryuuga roared.

He had a large build of three meters, but Ryuuga's explosive punch blew him away like he was a scrap of paper.

"Bugh-beh!"

Like a skipping stone, Shidora rolled at a tremendous speed while bouncing on the ground. And like that, he crashed into a concrete wall, creating a second

hole.

While I was dumbfounded, the apostle melted and disappeared twenty meters in front of me. Even without unleashing the might of the “Dragon King,” Hinomori Ryuuga’s power amounting to this much...is incredible.

“Ichirou! Elle! Are you hurt?”

Ignoring Shidora, Ryuuga’s expression changed and she focused back on us.

I’m grateful that she’s worried about us, but I was not calm on the inside.

I’d hoped that she’d reserve a little bit of that kindness for Shidora.

(Shidora died...the strange flag has been raised. I’ve been given a mysterious setting...)

Seeing that I was on the verge of tears, Ryuuga came and embraced me. I’m pretty sure she’s wearing a sarashi right now, but even so, there was a faint elasticity in her chest.

“Ichirou, it’s okay now! It was frightening, wasn’t it? You wanted to cry, didn’t you?”

Ryuuga stroked my head like she was dealing with a child. Then she rubbed my cheeks together.

There’s a different reason as for why I’m on the verge of tears, but I didn’t correct her. I just don’t have the willpower to.

“Hey, Ryuuga. Did you not make a mistake in which person to embrace?”

Seeing me like that, Elmira puffed her cheeks in dissatisfaction.

“Why is it not me, but Kobayashi Ichirou? Do you, by any chance, prefer a male-male relationship?”

“No, that’s...ah ha ha.”

In a panic, Ryuuga lets go of me and scratches her head while trying to avoid the question. Hey, don’t blush. She’s genuinely going to think that you swing that way.

“But, well, that’s alright for me. To be honest, boys being lovey-dovey is my favorite thing.”

Elmira just revealed a troublesome hobby of hers. You were already a pretty dark character, so I'd prefer if you restrain yourself from turning even more sinister.

"T, that's not it. Unlike you, Ichirou is an ordinary person."

"I'm having doubts on whether or not he's an ordinary person, though."

"Ah ha ha. Certainly, it's possible that Ichirou may not be your average guy."

Though Ryuuga made another smile while saying that, I wasn't smiling at all.

This dilemma I'm facing right now isn't going to end with a joke.

"Well, enough of that."

Not knowing my feelings, Elmira suddenly switched attitudes. She gazed at me for a moment before shifting her attention to Ryuuga.

"Ryuuga, I wonder if it's okay to ask for one thing."

"Hmm? What?"

"Starting from today, I want the privilege of being able to suck blood from Kobayashi Ichirou as well, is that okay?"

"Eh?"

Ryuuga and I both let out a voice in response to her sudden request.

"His blood is currently the number one best so far. The taste and of course, the flame energy yield, are both excellent...please give me permission."

"N, no! Absolutely not!"

Ryuuga shook her head. She then clung onto my right arm.

"Don't absorb Ichirou's blood! There was no choice in the matter this time, but never do it again!"

"Isn't it fine? Please make Kobayashi Ichirou my exclusive donor."

"I will not! Ichirou is mine!"

"Well Ryuuga. That desire to monopolize him is...very good! Let it blossom!"

Being excited for whatever odd reason, Elmira clung onto my left arm.

Suddenly, they started a game of tug-o-war with me in the center of it.

“Come on Ryuuga! Let the jealousy develop!”

“Elle! Let go! Ichirou belongs to me!”

“I, I can’t bear this!”

...Hey, stop. I’m not happy about this. Actually, I feel miserable.”

The protagonist and a heroine shouldn’t compete for a sub-character. Who would want to see such banter?

(No wait. Perhaps I’m...not a sub-character anymore?)

The female protagonist has been paying special attention to me, my relations with the heroines are deepening, and furthermore, one of the “Apostles of Hell” hesitated to attack me. In what world would this be a minor role?

It’s no longer possible to correct my relationship with Ryuuga. It could be said that Kobayashi Ichirou’s position in this story has completely fallen apart.

(Who in the world am I?)

One ominous thought once again crossed my mind.

...I was told that the “Apostles of Hell” are planning to revive their fallen king, the “Evil Spirit.”

So what if a companion of the female protagonist turns out to be the “Evil Spirit?”

What if that person was close with the other heroines as well?

Wouldn’t it be a very exciting development for the story’s climax?

Chapter 4

Part 1

It's possible that I...might be the story's final boss.

Once that one suspicion stuck, it didn't leave my head.

Let's assume that's true. If so, then that would explain the various strange events that occurred.

It would explain why a mere friend character was able to trigger flags with the heroines.

Perhaps everything was leading up to this? Maybe I'm the final boss who will stand in the way of Ryuuga and the others—and so, the stage is being set for that.

The more I thought about it, the more I couldn't laugh at the matter.

Upon some reflection, there certainly are...some moments that might indicate this being true. There are at least three matters that made me go "If I think about it, aren't I kinda strange?"

—Number one. Why was Kobayashi Ichirou able to peep at the battles without being found for a long time?

Ryuuga had told me something before. She said "Ichirou, you're really good at erasing your presence. You're even able to take me by surprise."

Ryuuga, the heroines, and the apostles didn't notice me. Is there really an ordinary person that can do that?

—Number two. Why did not Kobayashi Ichirou fall unconscious at the karaoke center?

At that time, the apostle let out a hypnotic wave that put the guests and staff to sleep. Among them, I was the only one that was still awake.

Since I was so calm about the matter, it seems that Ryuuga and the others overlooked it. Is there really an ordinary person like that?

—Number three. Why is Kobayashi Ichirou able to sense the ill will of an apostle?

When escaping from the alley while carrying Elmira, I could sense Shidora's ill will as he was chasing me from behind. At the time, I was frantic, so I didn't pay attention to it, but I shouldn't have been able to sense it.

I have a sensor that can detect the ill will a peculiarity is emitting. Is there really an ordinary person who has that?

(In the end, there's only one conclusion I can deduce. Perhaps I'm—not an ordinary person.)

I came across Hinomori Ryuuga, found out that he was a she, then we ended up having an intimate relationship.

I became Yukimiya Shiori's exclusive advisor, Aogasaki Rei's exclusive coordinator, and Elmira McCartney's exclusive donor.

Perhaps those were never meaningless events.

Triggering their flags was itself a flag for me becoming the final boss.

(At any rate, I need some solid proof. If I find some, then I'll just have to bravely resolve myself.)

If I'm the final boss, then there's one duty I want.

It's being able to thoroughly injure Ryuuga and the others, then being defeated in the end.

Then, I'd presumably die there. I'd get done in by "Dragon Fang," and the "Evil Spirit" would disappear as well.

(I feel that I'm a bit too young to die, but if that's my role...then I'll so be it.)

I find this strange myself, but my heart has been much calmer than before.

It's a much bigger relief than having to go around everywhere and lose my mind over the flags.

Each person has a role they're supposed to fulfill. If that means being the final boss, then I have no choice but to do it. I have to be as bad as possible.

A close person blocking the way as an opponent...also falls within a friend

character's duties, to an extent.

Surely Ryuuga will grieve. It pains my chest thinking about it, but there's nothing that can be done.

At the very least, I'd like Ryuuga to remember me in flashback.

Kobayashi Ichirou was a frivolous and close friend.

As I made my resolve, Ryuuga and the others suddenly became busy on a daily basis.

I was told that the movements of the "Apostles of Hell" have become lively again. Perhaps they're getting closer to the revival of the "Evil Spirit." In other words, my awakening.

"Ichirou, sorry we haven't been hanging out recently. I want to hurry and show you my bunny costume..."

I replied to the apologetic Ryuuga with a smile while saying "Don't worry about it."

"Kobayashi. We'll win, right...?"

I encourage the uneasy Yukimiya by saying "Have faith in your companions."

"Kobayashi. I wonder what color swimsuits are in fashion this year."

I told the distressed Aogasaki "Yellow-green."

"Kobayashi Ichirou. Let me absorb some blood."

I secretly gave the dependent vampire some blood.

...Meanwhile, I was taking different actions from Ryuuga and the others. I walked around here and there whenever time allowed me to. My aim is to look for the "Apostles of Hell."

If I secretly come into contact with an apostle, I can confirm my true identity. If my guess is wrong, then I'll have to escape with a dash.

I haven't awakened any unusual abilities yet, but it seems possible for me to throw off an apostle...I can manage that much.

(The battle with Ryuga and others is probably entering its climax. I can't

dawdle about.)

I started wandering around town, and then came the fifth day.

On that day, I finally found someone that appeared to be an apostle.

It was past 9 o'clock. I revisited the abandoned factory just in case, and got a result.

Standing there was a female high-school student wearing an unfamiliar uniform—she looks like a normal woman at first glance, but she was obviously not human. Her ill will was lingering.

“...Hmm? A human?”

The high school girl immediately noticed me and raised an eyebrow.

Naturally, the electric lights weren't working, so the abandoned factory relied only on the moon for lighting. However, I could recognize that she was a pretty girl with a slender physique and had a ponytail to the side.

“Mwahaha...you're a foolish human for coming alone to a place like this. I was just getting bored, and then comes someone to play with.”

“Before you do that, can I ask you something?”

I approach the girl apostle who was suspiciously licking her lips. I ensured that I had a straight path towards the entrance so that I could escape at any time.

“Oh? Do you comprehend your own standing? You're going to die here.”

“Take a look at me...do you sense anything?”

An ordinary person stood in front of the apostle while unafraid. As expected, she was confused.

Thanks to Shidora, I've already gotten used to the ill wills. I was overwhelmed by them in the beginning, but they're no big deal after experiencing them once. I'm quite adaptable.

“...Wait a moment. Huh? You—”

The girl apostle took a long pause and squinted her eyes. With a puzzled expression, she took a close examination of me.

...So there really is something about me. It seems that Shidora wasn't misunderstanding something.

"So how about it? Are you going to kill me?"

After I got straight to the point, sure enough, the girl apostle shook her head.

"No...that's impossible."

"And why is that?"

—Because dwelling within you, is our king, the "Evil Spirit"—

I expected that kind of response, but what the girl apostle said ended up being very ambiguous.

"As for why, I'm a bit stumped. Well, I'm certain it's because you're an existence that's close to us."

"Is it not because I'm the final boss? Speak frankly, girl apostle!"

"I'm Mion."

"I don't need any self-introductions!"

Mion scratched the temple of her forehead as she got closer to me.

She openly made a face that looked as if...she had gotten involved with a strange man.

"Hey, I'm the final boss, right? That's what it is, right? Put me at ease already!"

"I don't know what you mean by final boss, but if you're talking about the "Evil Spirit," then that's not it."

"N, not it...?"

"Right. The revival of the 'Evil Spirit' certainly needs a human body as a vessel, but you are not that human."

"That's absurd..."

What is she saying?

I took great risks to come into contact with an apostle, and things went completely against my expectations. My final boss prediction was debunked.

“The ‘Evil Spirit’ doesn’t dwell inside me...?”

“After all, we already found what we’re going to summon the “Evil Spirit” with. The resurrection will occur in the near future. I can already imagine Hinomori Ryuuga’s face going pale.”

“So you’ve already found one...”

No way. I’m supposed to be the final boss.

Ryuuga and the others would defeat me in a final battle, then in the end, I’d return to my true self and say “Thank you everyone...I’m free from the ‘Evil Spirit’ now,” while disappearing. Afterwards, Ryuuga and the others would look up towards the evening sky and my smiling face would appear there—that was supposed to be my role.

But that’s not it? That duty has already met its quota? And I’m not a part of it?

“Then what kind of a person am I! What kind of character am I!”

“I, I said I don’t know already! Hey, just where are you touching!”

Mion frantically tries to pull me away as I cling onto her skirt. Despite being an apostle, she’s blushing and getting feisty.

“Anyways, I’m not going to kill you! I’m not sure about the reason for it either!”

“I’m not giving up! Isn’t it fine? Make me your king!”

“Don’t say such impudent things!”

At an abandoned factory in the evening, an apostle and human were struggling against each other. From an outsider’s perspective, it doesn’t look like some kind of love quarrel.

“Ah, I get it! If I’m not the final boss, I’m an apostle, right? I’m a companion of you guys, right? So that’s why you’re not killing me, right?”

“That’s not...kyaa! Don’t shove your face into my skirt! Don’t look at my panties!”

“An apostle wouldn’t wear panties!”

“Leave me alone! Basically, you’re not anything disguised as a human, okay?! Your figure right now is your true form, okay?!”

“T, that’s...”

“So you’re not an apostle! Alright? You’re a human! You’re in a position to be attacked by apostles! You can’t attack an apostle!”

...With my view having been completely rejected, I noticed that I had slumped onto the floor.

(Not good. I’m at a stalemate...)

I at least wanted to be an apostle. There would then still be a way for an apostle to have the heart of a human and be on the protagonist’s side. If things went well, perhaps I could even return to being a friend character as a peculiarity.

Mion sits down next to me with her back hunched.

“Really...what in the world are you?”

“That’s what I was asking...”

“You can’t just be an ordinary human?”

“Various flags were raised...and now I’m already at the point of no return.”

I desperately strained myself as hard as I could, but I’m really not an apostle. The straining only resulted in a nosebleed.

“I don’t know a lot, but don’t worry too much about it. The world is going to be destroyed anyways once the ‘Evil Spirit’ revives.”

Mion takes out a handkerchief and wipes my nosebleed.

She’s a surprisingly helpful apostle. Oh yeah, and she had black lace panties.

“Well, don’t be discouraged and hang in there, boy. The future will be dark!”

“Hmph. Ryuga’s going to kill that ‘Evil Spirit.’”

“I can’t overlook that comment. Are you Hinomori Ryuuga’s friend, perhaps?”

“Please don’t tell that person about what happened just now.”

“Ah, right. Do you know Shidora? He’s my subordinate, and I’ve lost contact

with him.”

“Don’t say talk anymore. Or rather, just leave me be.”

“*sigh*, I give up...I can’t kill you, so I’m worried about what will happen if I leave you by yourself...”

So, after a while, Mion let me rest my head on her lap. I was disgruntled at the abandoned factory until late at night.

It was definitely a scene I couldn’t let Ryuuga and the others see.

Part 2

I took an absence from school for three days after that.

To be honest, I didn't want to see anyone. I was frightened that I might trigger another flag if I take even one step outside. Once you suspect something, everything else will seem suspicious.

(What course of action do I take...?)

Laying on my bed, I stared at the ceiling all day long, and continued pondering about my purpose of existence.

For these three days, I didn't sleep or even eat. However, that's not a problem. I can still function as normal even if I don't sleep for a week. Being young is amazing.

(Where did I...go wrong?)

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

To start with, Ryuuga wasn't supposed to be a girl. No wait, what I mean when I say that is I wasn't supposed to know about the hidden side of Ryuuga and the others.

I'm a sub-character, and yet I got too involved with the story. In the end—I've become an ambiguous mystery character that I myself don't even know the true identity to.

(Anyways, I don't have time to worry about my role anymore. The battle with Ryuuga and the others...is approaching its final phase.)

I got a message from Ryuuga this morning.

'To Ichirou. It seems you caught a bad cold, so you don't have to force yourself to reply. I think that we're getting close to exterminating the apostles. So until then, I have to prioritize my mission. This is also for the sake of keeping up our current relationship.'

Ryuuga's battle will reach its end soon. However, it probably won't go smoothly.

Mion had said something. She talked about how the revival of the 'Evil Spirit' will begin in the near future. They already found what to summon him with.

The final battle, and the decisive match, involve that 'Evil Spirit.' Once victory is gained, then the world will return to its peace. The story will reach its ending.

(Is it fine if I just silently observe?)

I'm uneasy about it, but I don't know my position. I can't find a role that I'm supposed to accomplish.

If Ryuuga comes back to her senses after conquering the "Evil Spirit" and being freed from her duties, there may be a way for me to return to being a friend character. Perhaps I can somehow get out of my semi-boyfriend role and settle into a position that I want.

No wait, that's not it—I wouldn't be a "friend character" by then. I'd just be a "friend".

The world would already regain peace, so things would be post-conclusion. At that point, Hinomori Ryuuga isn't really a protagonist anymore.

If it's just hanging out, then I'm not really needed. Since Ryuuga had a mission to accomplish, I wanted to support her. Doing that would also lead to protecting the world.

(Ultimately—all that I wish for is to have a unique reason for being. In that case, perhaps it's fine being Ryuuga's boyfriend? No, that isn't any kind of solution, I've been rejecting that kind of thing to this day, and...)

While thinking of such things, my cell phone suddenly rang.

"!"

I unintentionally sprung up from my bed, and immediately checked my phone screen.

It was not a notification sound for a message. It was a phone call. And, the one calling was—Ryuuga.

Perhaps, she's already regained peace for the world?

I turned pale from the anxiety, then at the next moment, something occurred.

thud! I heard a tremendously loud noise, and my room trembled.

“Whoa!”

I suddenly fell down from my bed, and tumbled out of my room. The impact was like if a meteorite fell down on the neighborhood.

Despite the floor and windows still rumbling, I pushed the call button anyways.

It’s obvious that there’s no way this situation and Ryuuga’s call are unrelated.

“Hello! Ichirou!”

I heard Ryuuga shout as I held the cell phone to my ear. Judging from her alarming voice, it was easy to realize that something was dire.

“Ry, Ryuga, what the heck happened? There was a devastating impact just—.”

“This is serious! Kyouka...Kyouka!”

What Ryuuga said next were words that I had never expected.

“Kyouka became the ‘Evil Spirit!’”

“Wha—”

There was another explosion somewhere, and my house shook.

However, I’m not paying attention to those kinds of things anymore. I kneeled on the floor with my eyes wide in surprise and my mouth agape. I only kneel down during serious moments.

“Kyouka was chosen as the one to summon the ‘Evil Spirit’ with! We’re the Hinomori household, a family that inherits the ‘Dragon King’...a deity can dwell within us, making us suitable as a vessel! Most likely, the same applies for the ‘Evil Spirit’...”

The way Ryuuga’s speaking is a lot like a man right now. Perhaps it’s due to the confusion, or perhaps it’s because the heroines are around her.

“Kyouka is the final boss...”

I never expected that the vessel Mion was talking about would be the

protagonist's sister.

I don't want to say this, but that's a far more shock-inducing candidate than me. For Ryuuga, her sister is a more important symbol of her daily life compared to me.

"S, so, what happened to Kyouka?"

"Her consciousness was taken over by the 'Evil Spirit,' and is heading towards the riverbank...are you at home, Ichirou?! Do not, under any circumstance, go outside!"

"Huh, why?"

"A bunch of doors to the spirit world have opened! Right now, the city is overflowing with many apostles that are coming from—"

There, the phone call suddenly got cut off.

For a while, I couldn't move while the cell phone was still next to my ear.

"Kyouka is the final boss..."

While stunned, I repeated that to myself.

I didn't really consider what would happen in the event of a surprise like this. There is one thing I do know, though. This is a harsh development for Ryuuga.

If Kyouka is the vessel, then Ryuuga won't be able to fight her. She won't be able to make an attack, knowing that it's her sister she's against.

As expected of the final boss, they know how to liven things up into a climax... actually, this isn't the time to be impressed.

This is against what Ryuuga wanted, but it's impossible for me to keep still. At this rate, if I just stay kneeling at home, then that really would make me a "person that doesn't know anything."

(I'm still Ryuga's semi-boyfriend...which means I'm still an important character right now. How I act here will affect the quality of the story!)

I'm a pro at being a co-star.

From the time I was cast as a frilled lizard at a play, I've always been living as such.

Fortunately, the apostles can't attack me. So I should have no problems stepping outside. Nonetheless, since I don't have any unusual abilities, my risk of danger remains the same though...

However, I have to make a move anyways! I have to get involved with the final battle in some way!

(I don't know where to go. I might not even have any work to do when I'm there. I need to cease my worries! Now that it's come to this, I have to actively take part in the main story!)

Even if my only role is to be a "commentator," or perhaps a "victim" of all things.

If I can help Ryuuga, if I can contribute to the story, then I won't have any regrets in my life. I will not let myself be a spectator because I am "the female protagonist's companion."

(Wait for me, Ryuga! I'm heading off now! I'm the semi-boyfriend with a mysterious setting!)

A minute later, I quickly jumped out of the house.

Since these might be the clothes I die in, I changed into an easily-identifiable uniform.

Part 3

Sure enough, the city had fallen into a large panic.

As I ran towards the direction with many people, the number of screams increased.

...I'm worried about Ryuuga, but first of all, I have to evacuate these ordinary people.

If serious harm occurs, then Ryuuga is in danger of being harshly criticized. I have to avoid that with the best of my abilities.

(How many freaking doors to the spirit world were opened?)

Slipping through the escaping people, I searched for an apostle.

Soon after, I spotted a gorilla-like apostle running rampant in the middle of a three-lane road. It grabbed abandoned automobiles and tossed them at buildings, destroying them.

(The nerve that guy has to pop up during the climax!)

Being careful, I briskly walked up to him, and then—

“Sparrows start to nest, first cherry blossoms, distant thunder.”

Following the jingling sounds of a Kagura suzu was the clear voice of a girl.

In that exact moment, the movements of the gorilla apostle turned sluggish. This was a phenomenon I had seen before, but this time it didn't stop there.

The nearby trees rustled in unison. After that, their branches extended and coiled around the apostle like a rope.

“Grrr! W, what is this!”

“Swallows return, wild geese fly north, first rainbows...Apostle, this is as far as you'll go.”

It was “The Shrine Maiden of Life” that showed up—Yukimiya Shiori.

Her long hair fluttered, the hems of her skirt waved, and she stepped towards the confused gorilla apostle.

(Yukimiya...! Don't tell me you're here by yourself?)

I had a habit where if I'm peeking at a battle, I would hide myself behind a car. From behind, I saw Yukimiya show up, confronting the eight meter tall apostle.

"I, I can't move...little girl, is this your doing?!"

"I am 'The Shrine Maiden of Life.' I can heal wounds by bestowing the vitality of life, or I can weaken movements by taking away vitality. And, with a strong enough mindset, I can insert a certain amount of vitality into plants to do this—"

Immediately after, the gorilla apostle let out a voice of anguish.

The tree branches suddenly grew strong, cracking the bones of the apostle's entire body.

"Gugaaaah! Guh, gah..."

At the end of the merciless binding, both arms of the gorilla apostle loosely dangled. Next, his head feebly hung, then he began to melt and disappear within the branches.

"This is my new technique I've made using my abilities—Tree Binding Execution."

While saying that, Yukimiya bowed to the disappearing apostle. After seeing that, it reminded me of how Ryuuga would one-sidedly kill an opponent in an instant.

...She was worried about only being able to have a support role, but she managed to acquire fighting strength.

Although she's a shrine maiden based on compassion, her technique had the word "execution" in it. Is it okay for her to follow this path?

(Yukimiya, it'll also be a problem if you get too ruthless. Don't forget that you're the school's idol, okay?)

That's what I'm worried about.

Without time to even take a breather, many ill wills rushed in from all directions.

“!”

Up ahead, left, and right were new apostles that were swarming in. Maybe they heard the death cries of their companion?

Beast-like ones, fish-like ones, bug-like ones...a troop of over twenty surrounded Yukimiya. Though she acquired a new technique, as expected, she's outnumbered.

“Darn, there are still this many apostles...”

While Yukimiya was on guard, the apostles declared something in unison.

“Ehehehe! With the ‘Evil Spirit’ resurrected, this world is already ours! Give up, ‘Shrine Maiden of Life!’”

“Never! We will definitely protect everything until the very end! This town! This world!”

“Ehehehe! There are still five doors open. Our numbers are more than a hundred. This is already the end for you!”

“In that case, I’ll just have to defeat all of you!”

“Ehehehe! I wonder if you can even do that.”

“I can!”

“Aren’t you going to regret boasting later on?”

“Silence! Enough of your unsightly faces!”

“Eheh...”

“Your body colors are disgusting! Your skin is putrid!”

Not good. Yukimiya’s remarks are becoming more harsh and insensitive. She’s starting to hurt the feelings of the apostles.

I can’t afford to leave things as they are, and I mean that in multiple ways. Most of all, I can’t let Yukimiya face retirement here!

Thinking that, I immediately leaped from the back of the car, and charged towards the peculiarities surrounding Yukimiya. It’s okay, the apostles won’t lay a hand on me!

“Aaaaaaargh!”

Yukimiya and the apostles looked over at my direction in surprise.

In that time frame, I had already beaten the apostles in front of me.

“K, Kobayashi?!”

While Yukimiya was in shock, one by one, I was knocking out, kicking down, and tearing away through the apostles.

I don't know why myself, but my whole body was being filled with strength. My limbs were also emitting a small aura.

“W, who is this! A human?”

“Wait! Isn't that wrong?”

“Should we attack?”

“No, I feel like we can't for some reason...”

While the apostles were preparing to flee, I kept on single-mindedly going on a rampage. While doing so, I called out the Yukimiya, who was dumbfounded.

“Yukimiya! Get back to Ryuga!”

“Huh?”

Yukimiya blinks her eyes. Well, it'd be natural for her to be surprised when a sub-character suddenly appears and starts kicking the enemies around.

“Supporting that person is your duty! It's no problem if you leave this to me!”

“K, Kobayashi. What in the world are...”

“Now's not the time to be minding such things! Hurry up and go!”

I turned into a strange character after my tension rose up in the midst of my rampage.

“Is it really okay if I...?”

“It's as you can see! If you can defeat the 'Evil Spirit,' then the motivation of these guys will definitely turn into nothing! Their means to victory will also turn into nothing!”

“I, I understand...cool winds blow, evening cicadas sing, thick fog descends.”

While nodding her head and turning around, Yukimiya recited some of the microseasons.

Upon which, the trees once again extended their branches and coiled around the apostles.

“Kobayashi! Once I leave this area, Tree Binding Execution will last for ten minutes! Please escape by then!”

“Alright! Thank you, Yukimiya!”

“...Shiori is fine.”

Yukimiya ran off, leaving behind some troubling words. She headed towards the riverbank, where Ryuuga and the ‘Evil Spirit’ were.

The apostles, with their prey having escaped, started booing me from all four directions.

“Hey you! What are you doing!”

“You just suddenly appeared and started fighting us empty-handed!”

“To start with, who are you! What is that strange presence you have!”

There were an abundant variety of peculiarities, and they shouted while struggling within the tree branches.

I let my fists loose on each and every one of them in silence.

I’ve completely given up on being an ordinary person now.

After using those ten minutes to suppress the apostles, I once again sprinted towards the direction where there were ill wills.

It’s likely that the heroines left the ‘Evil Spirit’ to Ryuuga and are dealing with the raging apostles in the streets.

I should take over for them so that they can head over to Ryuuga and support her. I think that all the main characters have to be present during the story’s conclusion, the final battle.

(It looks like the evacuation of everyone has almost finished...apparently the

apostles are prioritizing the heroines, so that makes things convenient!)

I advance forward while beating the daylights out of wandering apostles that I come across along the way.

Soon, I found “The Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance”—Aogasaki Rei.

(Whoa, what is this?)

It was a ghastly scene where the corpses of apostles were lying on the floor all around.

There seems to be around thirty corpses. All of them were cut up by a sharp blade, and they were melting or evaporating here and there. If there were also opponents that had already disappeared, then she’s subjugated many of them already.

(It’s not only Yukimiya, but also Aogasaki that’s gotten stronger than before?)

I wonder if there was power-up event that happened while I was indoors. Anyways, it seems that she’s going to wrap things up around here soon...or so I thought.

Soon after, Aogasaki was having a hard time.

In front of Aogasaki, who was wielding her wooden sword, was a heron-like apostle who calmly stood with an air of composure. Her arms were wings, looking a lot like what’s known as a harpy.

With a physique that isn’t very large, she gives a weak impression at first glance. This was an apostle with quite a human-like face. However, the might of the emitted ill will was in a different league, it was brutal.

There’s no doubt that this apostle is one of the top-class...and she has breasts, making her a girl apostle. Unfortunately, her feathers are covering them, so I can’t confirm if she has nipples.

“Mwahaha...you’re not done yet, “Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance.” You still haven’t taken down fifty apostles with that one stick of yours. However, I’m not going to send any more small fries, alright?”

“I can see. That’s why I need to slay you here!”

Aogasaki boldly declares that while thrusting the tip of her blade. After all, this is the kind of character she is.

I notice a small glint in Aogasaki's eyes, but the girl apostle reacts calmly.

"Ahahaha! You'll win against me, you say? I'm 'The Third Princess of Hell,' Mion!"

With a loud laughter, the girl apostle lets out her name, and it's unexpectedly one that I recognize.

(Mion? That girl is Mion?)

The one that was unexpectedly helpful, had a ponytail to the side, and wore black lace panties?

Furthermore, she said she was "The Third Princess of Hell." I didn't know that the apostles also had three major heroines among them.

"Female apostle! Victory is commonplace for me!"

"Then let me play with you!"

The two had clashed before I could break in.

Aogasaki strikes out with a tremendous speed, and Mion flies around to counterattack, also at a ridiculous speed. My eyes wouldn't stop moving around when viewing this battle of great swiftness.

"You're slow, 'Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance.' Look, over here!"

While saying her provocation, Mion soared high into the sky. So it's come to this?

For Aogasaki, who wields a wooden sword, a flight-type enemy is a bad match for her. Even if you account for the length of the wooden sword, her range is still only two or three meters...it's making me worry.

"Secret Sword, Sonic Blade!"

When Aogasaki swung down her wooden sword, a void wave released from the blade.

A blade of wind soared through the air, similar to Kamaitachi, and headed towards the opponent. (TLN: Kamaitachi are Japanese youkai that swiftly cut up

their victims in a whirlwind)

“Wha...!”

Mion’s complexion changed after seeing the ranged attack that was beyond her expectations. Dodging the attack by a hair, she gets onto the surface and distances herself from her opponent.

(T, that was dangerous...Mion got careless.)

An ordinary apostle would have received a direct hit and that would end it. As expected, she’s in the top-class. Or rather, why am I feeling relieved?

“You dodged it? It seems you really are an apostle I can’t deal with using normal means.”

Aogasaki once again approached Mion.

In face of that, Mion sharpens her wings into blades.

“*huff* Who knew you had a projectile...I hadn’t been taken by surprise like that in a long time.”

“I am ‘The Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance.’ The core of my ability is controlling the way of the sword. Now that I’ve awakened to the deepest level of the art, my field is no longer limited to just close combat.”

“What a nuisance, Gin-and-Tonic.”

“Sonic Blade.”

...I didn’t think Aogasaki would acquire a new technique as well. Also, that one name sounded cocktail-like.

(Is she trying to move out of her Japanese-style character design at this stage? I’d kinda appreciate it if she didn’t deviate, but...wait, now’s not the time to be worrying about such things!)

I can’t afford to just thoughtlessly spectate. I’m not a sub-character anymore.

“Female apostle! This time I’ll have your head!”

“I, Mion, will not be made light of!”

At the moment the two were about to resume their battle, I leaped in

between the two of them.

The sheen on Aogasaki's sword fades as I grab her wrist. At the same time, I grasp Mions sharp wings between two of my fingers.

“!”

Aogasaki and Mion were both surprised.

However, I myself am not startled. Since I'm not an ordinary person, I probably can do this much like it's normal. My power surge from a bit ago was still in effect.

“Are the both of you not going to stop?”

The two stare blankly as I make my comment. Since I was still in high tension, I became a strange character again.

“K, Kobayashi...?”

“Y, you, at this time...”

Ignoring their confusion, I glared at Aogasaki first.

“Ms. Aogasaki! Now's not the time to be fooling about!”

“Huh? M, Ms.?”

“Don't forget about the battle with the final boss! Why does it seem like you're not going?”

“Well, but...”

“I won't hear any excuses! Furthermore, Ms. Mion!”

Continuing on, I glared at Mion next.

Overwhelmed by my vigor, Mion froze in place. Her entire bloodthirst vanished in a flash.

“Do you recognize my figure?!”

“Y, you appeared again...the sexual harasser that I can't attack for some reason!”

Her voice stiffened with fear. Her cheek twitched. How rude.

“What do you mean by sexual harasser?! Didn’t you also get swept away by the mood?!”

“T, That’s wron—”

“Did you not go as far as to clean my ears?!” (TLN: *Ear cleaning is generally seen as a sign of intimacy in Japan.*)

“No! That’s not right! That’s what you call an delusion by the mind causing a...”

“Anyways, I won’t forgive you if you attack a human! Otherwise, next time, my harassment just stop at the degree of where it went last time. You can relay that your subordinates as well!”

“N, nooooooooo! Pervert!”

Immediately, Mion screamed while fleeing.

She jumped, spread her wings, and flew away in the sky as fast as she could. In the blink of an eye, her figure blended into the glowing sunset. Since the situation turned out like this, things should be fine.

Thus, Aogasaki and I were the only ones remaining.

This is a secret, but it was quite lucky that Mion ran away. I honestly didn’t want to see her die.

I have a debt to repay after she let me rest my head on her lap. Furthermore, my head surprisingly matches well with her thighs.

“K, Kobayashi. What in the world are you...”

Aogasaki, who hasn’t yet grasped the situation, barely squeezed out a voice.

“Ms. Aogasaki, go with haste.”

I repeated my intentions to her with an intense expression.

Unfortunately, my tone of voice didn’t return back to normal. Please do not pursue too deeply into this character.

“At this very moment, Ryuga is fighting the ‘Evil Spirit’ by his lonesome self. Furthermore, the vessel for the ‘Evil Spirit’ is his sister, the lovely Kyouka.”

“Uh...”

“If you don’t support Ryuga now, when will you ever get the chance to?! Would you pass away in satisfaction sacrificing yourself to hunt these apostles?!”

“So that’s why you were acting absurd. You put yourself at risk...so that I wouldn’t die...”

“Come now, rush back to Ryuga with haste! Run like the wind!”

“...I understand. I’ll do as you say.”

She stared at my direction with her eyes moist for whatever reason. Aogasaki complied and started running.

“Kobayashi! You have to evacuate! Don’t conduct any reckless behavior again!”

“If it so pleases you!”

“I wonder what on earth happened. My chest is beating so fast...”

I heard Aogasaki speak to herself as she ran off, but I decided to pretend that I didn’t hear it.

Now that I had sent Aogasaki off, I ran around the whole town searching for the remaining major heroine.

The only one left is Elmira McCartney. It’s likely that she’s out there somewhere repelling the apostles. Once I cover for her, all the actors will be present at the final battle.

(The number of apostles out there are around one hundred. There shouldn’t be that many left, though. No wait, since the “Evil Spirit” opened those doors, it’s possible that new troops could come in...)

That being the case, the heroines have to hurry and get to the riverbank. Otherwise, the “Evil Spirit” won’t be defeated and the situation won’t reach its major conclusion.

I need to have them rush in dramatically to support Ryuuga, who can’t attack her sister...and, while I was thinking about that,

“Kobayashi Ichirou!”

Elmira came to me from up ahead.

Her prized scarlet hair was in disorder, and was somewhat darkened. Her uniform was covered in dirt, and her manner of walking was unsteady. It seemed she was quite exhausted.

Perhaps she was forced into a hard struggle. Perhaps if I had met with her sooner...

“Are you okay?! Elmira, you—”

“Give me your blood!”

Rushing up to me while I was confused, Elmira plunged her teeth into the nape of my neck.

“Huh? W, wait a minu—”

At that exact moment, she began to forcibly absorbing my blood. I was amazed at her absorption force, it was like a foreign-brand vacuum cleaner.

“Ah, guh...”

My whole body lost its strength in a flash, and I fell onto the floor.

However, Elmira did not let me go. I had no choice but to listen to her gulp down.

“...Aaah! Your blood really is the very best!”

About a minute later, Elmira finally stopped sucking blood.

While wiping her mouth, she had already recovered from her exhaustion as if it hadn't even happened. Her body was glossy and her deep crimson hair regained its vividness.

“So, Kobayashi Ichirou? What are you doing in a place like this?”

The vampire asks that question at this late of a time.

However, I can't even give a reply. Slumping on the floor, the best I could do was give a moan.

“Say, are you fighting against the apostles? As I expected, you're doing

something reckless.”

“Ugh...”

“Don’t worry. I can’t sense the ill wills of apostles anywhere now. For the time being, the town is safe...I wonder if Shiori and Rei are safe.”

“The two...are back with Ryuga...”

Mustering the energy I had left, I finally manage to tell her that.

“Eh, is that so?”

“You too...should hurry and go...help Ryuga...”

I’ve once again turned into a strange character. This time it’s different though, since now my tension is at its lowest.

“I see. My supply is in top shape now, so I’m not disheveled anymore. With my current self, there’s no need to fear the ‘Evil Spirit.’”

As my field of vision turned blurry, I saw Elmira do a peace sign. However, I couldn’t react to it. It seemed that I was losing focus and losing consciousness.

“Kobayashi Ichirou, take refuge. Leave the rest to us.”

“Alright...I’ll...take refuge....”

“When I come back, let me absorb some blood, okay? Keep this a secret from Ryuuga.”

Whispering that at the end, Elmira gave a light wink.

Like that, she ran off full of spirit, and I vacantly saw her off with my dim consciousness. Since I lost an extreme amount of blood, my body was getting cold.

Can someone out there...give me a blood transfusion?

Part 4

I was now about ten minutes after I could stand up again.

I thought it would be futile trying to do more for today, but my body is tougher than I expected. While I was lying down, I could grasp how to control the aura somehow.

That vampire...if I were a normal person, I would've been in the hospital by now.

However, with this, the three major heroines should be there in time for the final battle.

I can't stay lying down either. I have to chase after them. I need to get more involved with the decisive battle.

(If I idle about, Ryuuga and the others might win without me. I have to head off before that. And—I have to find them.)

Who is Kobayashi Ichirou?

I have a hunch that I'll find the answer to that question before the end of the battle. I'm already late for the conclusion of the fight.

(Things can't conclude with me still remaining a mystery character. My pride will not allow it.)

If I don't reach an answer, then I'll force my way to unearth one. I'll search for my own role myself.

That's what I've gotten deeply involved for up until this point—what it is that makes me distinct.

(Come to think of it, the doors to the spirit world are still open, right? Is it fine to leave them alone?)

I'm a bit concerned about that, but I don't have the time to respond. Or rather, I don't know the means to seal the doors.

Surely, if the "Evil Spirit" is vanquished, the doors will shut on their own. That's probably how it works.

Not thinking much of them, I headed towards the riverbank.

When I arrived at the riverbank, the battle was in its midst.

Ryuuga and the heroines were in my line of sight as I looked down at the bank. On the opposite side stood Kyouka, with her back towards the river.

...I could grasp the situation of the battle at a glance.

Ryuuga was kneeling before Kyouka. She was breathing heavily, only being able to stare at her opponent. This is the first time I've ever seen Ryuuga in a disadvantageous situation.

The heroines were the same as well.

Although everyone began with energy to spare, they're already riddled with wounds now. They each had tears in their uniforms, giving a peek at their bare skin and underwear. I can say that they're indeed heroines in this aspect.

While Ryuuga and the others were in that state, Kyouka said something bluntly with a blank expression.

It was clearly a voice different from hers, it was a deep voice from a man.

"I am the 'Evil Spirit.' I am, as what humans call me—chaos."

Before I was aware of it, heavy dark clouds covered up the sky. Lightning flashed with rumbling roar.

A huge aura suddenly appeared from Kyouka's entire body.

That dark, sinister ill will took the form of a person behind her, and immediately became a large, burly man.

(Is that the 'Evil Spirit'...?!)

The density of the ill will increased and the 'Evil Spirit' quickly materialized.

There was a huge horn on his forehead. Large fangs protruded from his mouth. His disheveled hair bristled up, his arms were like sets of logs, and he glared at Ryuuga and the others with a furious expression...he looks quite like a demon.

"Now, you humans shall perish. Offer your blood, your flesh, your soul...to me."

Kyouka, with the “Evil Spirit” attached to her back, slowly approaches Ryuuga and the others.

I was nervously watching the situation while crouching down at the bank.

(Isn't this really bad? At this rate, it'll be the protagonist's side that'll get taken down...)

The “Evil Spirit” seems to be that tough of an enemy. Mion's ill will was large, but this guy's is on a far different realm. The world could really get destroyed—this is no joke.

(What to do? Do I take part in the battle? Is it really okay for me to intervene during this scene? Someone give me some stage directions!)

My impatience was progressing.

Suddenly, Yukimiya, Aogasaki, and Elmira all got up one after another. Together, they stood in the way of the “Evil Spirit” to protect Ryuuga.

“...Everyone, do you need any healing?”

“No, I'm fine. My sword will not go dull with just this much.”

“Same for me. I can't let it end like this after rushing over here.”

While exchanging those words, the heroines looked back at Ryuuga.

“E, everyone...”

Ryuuga could not yet stand up, and could only look up at the three. Rather than physical damage, perhaps the mental damage from her enemy being Kyouka is larger.

However, the hearts of the heroines haven't yielded yet.

Yukimiya, Aogasaki, and Elmira all gave a smile to encourage the protagonist. However, you people shouldn't forget about your skin being exposed.

This makes me flustered in a couple of ways, but...they really are splendid heroines. They're worthy of being main characters.

“Hinomori. I'll use my power as ‘The Shrine Maiden of Life’ with you until the very end.”

“I am ‘The Swordswoman of the Beheading Dance.’ Ryuuga...I’ll be your sword.”

“Don’t forget me, ‘The Blood-kin of Eternal Darkness.’ Let me show you my true power.”

The three spoke their resolves, and at that moment,

An intense torrent of light began flowing from the heroines’ bodies. They had done the unthinkable, their auras were on-par with Ryuuga’s.

Yukimiya’s radiance was white. Aogasaki’s was blue. Elmira’s was red...it seems that their colors reflect their image. Then,

“Unleashing divine might—‘White Tiger!’”

“Unleashing divine might—‘Azure Dragon!’”

“Unleashing divine might—‘Vermilion Bird!’ Okay!”

In response to their calls, their auras took the form of beasts in a flash.

(T, those are...the four gods!)

I unintentionally lean forward and gaze at the three.

—The four gods. the White Tiger of the West, the Azure Dragon of the East, the Vermilion Bird of the South, and the Black Tortoise of the North are sacred, holy beasts that rule over the four directions. I’m sure that everyone has seen them at least once in anime or games. (*TLN: This is a part of East-Asian mythology*)

The holy beasts are here.

They materialized on the back of the heroines and let out an ear-piercing roar.

Don’t tell me that the cliché four gods are going to appear at this late of a moment...there also seems to be one of them missing. The Black Tortoise isn’t here.

It’s difficult to imagine Ryuuga being the Black Tortoise. Within her dwells the “Dragon King” ...who I believe is the “Yellow Dragon” that governs over the center. (*TLN: That’s part of the four gods as well. So that technically makes five of them, but the Yellow Dragon is often omitted.*)

So Ryuuga is a jack-of-all-trades. She can use all the abilities that the heroines have.

(Perhaps it's because it's difficult for a tortoise to get involved with a battle? There's four gods and yet, the Black Tortoise is missing...hmm?)

The Black Tortoise is—not here?

There, I was taken aback and gasped. I was wondering who Kobayashi Ichirou is...I feel that I can find my answer here.

(Perhaps I'm the Black Tortoise?)

Perhaps this is a foreshadowing of the truth. There are indeed some cases where a friend character awakens to a power and gets promoted to the protagonist's companion character.

Those kinds of people often speak and act mysteriously, they would spectate Ryuuga's battles from the shadows while chuckling to themselves, and above all, they have to be an ikemen, but...there's no use talking about that part.

(I see! So that's what it was! That's why the apostles felt a strange presence from me! That's why there was an aura coming from me!)

Now that I think about it, since the protagonist is a woman, things get unbalanced without one of the companions being a boy.

Perhaps I'm here to balance it out. I wanted to be a sub-character, but I shouldn't speak selfishly. If this isn't my position, then what else would explain this situation?

(I won't resist it! I'll participate, participate!)

The heroines have unleashed their divine might now, but this is the ideal timing...I'll participate as the "Black Tortoise" and complete the four gods!

While I was excited and in joy, the heroines assaulted the "Evil Spirit" together with their sacred beasts. Just hang in there! The "Black Tortoise" is also here!

While I was going through such, the sacred beasts displayed their power.

Snow and ice went wild, a sudden gust broke out, raging flames burned

brightly. The ground trembled and split apart as they aimed towards the “Evil Spirit.” The riverbank was now a heaping pile of natural disasters.

“Oh...you lot are stronger than the ones a hundred years ago. You guardians of the ‘Yellow Dragon.’”

Facing a attack from three sides, the “Evil Spirit” seemed a bit unsure on what to do. The tide has completely turned.

However, I have one worry. Each time the “Evil Spirit” receives an attack, Kyouka’s face winces. Could it be that their pain is linked?

“Everyone, stop! When you attack, Kyouka...Kyouka!”

Ryuuga gave a cry of grief. Then, at that moment,

Seeing an opening in Ryuuga, the “Evil Spirit” brandished a large palm.

“It seems you’re the only one who’s gotten weak. Successor of the ‘Yellow Dragon.’”

Ill will instantly accumulated in the palm, and it released a jet black wave.

Taken by a moment of surprise, the heroines couldn’t react.

That severe, exceptional strike was flying in a straight line towards the defenseless Ryuuga, who currently didn’t have an aura.

“Watch out! Hinomori!”

“Ryuuga! Dodge!”

“Get away from it, Ryuuga!”

The protagonist is in a desperate pinch. The heroines can’t come to the rescue in time. Ryuuga herself can’t move either.

Who can break the deadlock in this dilemma?

I’ve decided. It’ll be me!

“Ryugaaaaaa!”

I had already leaped into the riverbank while raising a war cry.

I stood in front of Ryuuga to protect her, just like the heroines did before. Then the aura, cosmos, chakra, or whatever you wanna call it that was in my

body erupted at once.

The “Evil Spirit’s” wave was approaching. However, I wasn’t frightened. Ending my mystery character status is much more frightening for me.

(The “Black Tortoise” means a tortoise. A tortoise means a shell. A shell means toughness...I’ve found out that my unusual ability is the power of a strong defense!)

Right. That’s definitely the reason why the apostles hesitated to attack me.

They felt from instinct that they should take caution against my defense power. This seems quite convincing!

Exposing myself towards the imminent wave, I let out a loud cry. This will be the cry I use for my awakening.

“U, un, unleashing divine might! The Black Tor—”

I thought I’d be able to say it just in the nick of time. However, that phrase was unfamiliar to me, so I ended up fumbling on the words and ruining it. And the result was—

I took a direct hit from the wave and was blown off. I quickly flew about ten meters through the air.

“—toise!”

While saying the remainder of the phrase, I tumbled onto the ground. The world around me was spinning as I went dizzy, and one of my shoes fell off somewhere.

(Crap...I went and blew it...)

This was supposed to be my highlight scene. The scene that would really get things pumped up.

...My “Black Tortoise” awakening ended in vain.

Part 5

Despite it all, I was unhurt.

I thought I would lose a limb or that there even be a hole through my abdomen, but there wasn't anything in particular that happened. At best, I got a bump from hitting my head on the ground.

(Its activation...took long enough...)

While lying face up with my arms stretched out, I made that complaint.

Since I'm perfectly fine, it seems I really am the "Black Tortoise." However...I made quite the huge blunder. I was waiting for the right moment to make my grand entry and yet, I messed it up in one second.

(Darn it...if only I could have realized that I was the "Black Tortoise" sooner...)

That way, I could have rehearsed my lines for unleashing divine might. I wouldn't have fumbled on my words...such a regret is painning me.

"I, Ichiroooooou!"

With a shriek filled with tragedy, I heard the sound of running footsteps. That would of course be Ryuuga.

Neglecting the battle, she came and lifted my upper-body. I took a look at her face, and it was laden with tears.

"Ichirou, you idiot! Why did you do something that rash! I told you not to leave your house!"

Though she was angry, Ryuuga held me tight.

Under normal circumstances, I would pass away while in her arms, but...to repeat myself, I'm not injured.

"Are you okay? Ryuga."

"My condition doesn't matter right now! More importantly, Ichirou, Ichirou..."

Ryuuga had thoughtlessly returned to being a girl.

Fortunately, the heroines are keeping company with the "Evil Spirit," so they

didn't have the leeway to focus their attention here.

"Ichirou...don't die..."

"No, I'm—"

I was going to say that I'm fine, but I immediately halted my words.

In that moment, a certain "plan" flashed into my mind.

(Perhaps, this can make things be alright in the end? If I make use of this situation, couldn't I return to being a friend...?)

To carry out my plan at once, I'll pretend that I'm dying. I'll hide the fact that I'm fine, and I'll give a sweet smile while gasping.

"I'm glad as long as you're safe..."

"No! Definitely not! I can't live without you, Ichirou!"

"Don't cry Ryuga...there are things that you must do..."

My acting and these lines are coincidentally the same as that one play I did.

It was the same as my original sub-character role, the frilled lizard.

"I believe in you, Ryuga...defeat the "Evil Spirit," and have Kyouka come back for sure."

"B, but..."

"You should have faith in those three and fight..."

I was sneaking in my real motive there.

At the time I thought I was the final boss, I intended on disappearing with the "Evil Spirit," but thinking about it, what's used to summon him is only a "vessel." After all, Ryuuga's "Dragon King" is passed down between generations...handed down from human to human.

Even if the god disappears, the vessel will still remain—that point is the core of my "plan."

"Listen, Ryuga. I didn't save you so that you could cry here...you're supposed to protect this world...so show me that you can protect Kyouka...!"

Perhaps I'm talking a bit too long for a dying breath. This is difficult when

accounting for these things.

“If you defeat the ‘Evil Spirit’...I feel that I might be able to barely hang onto my life...”

“R, really...?”

“Yeah, I promise...now go, Ryuuga...if it’s you, you’ll definitely be able to...”

There, I pretended to faint.

All that’s left now is to spectate the conclusion. At any rate, if it seems that Ryuuga and the others still can’t win, I’ll participate again and muster up the most of my power.

(Well, such a worry is unlikely to happen, though.)

After gently laying my body on the ground, Ryuuga quietly gets up.

Her face had completely returned to that of a gallant boy’s. A golden aura rose from her whole body and she glared at the “Evil Spirit.”

“Ichirou, watch me. I’ll definitely defeat the ‘Evil Spirit’...and bring Kyouka back!”

Ah. I’m watching. How cool, Ryuuga. Your charm is the gap moe when you enter girl mode.

Thinking about it, she’s been giving me nothing but trouble. She’s been constantly showing me lewd cosplay.

But soon...I’m going to have to say farewell to those days.

“Unleashing divine might—‘Yellow Dragon!’”

With her loud scream, Ryuuga’s aura further expands. That aura gradually took the form of a golden dragon on her back.

While letting out a dazzling glimmer, the sacred beast’s body spanned about twenty meters—This is Hinomori Ryuuga’s guardian deity, the “Yellow Dragon.” Also known as “Ron.”

“Haaaaaaaaa!”

“Guaaaaaaaaa!”

Ryuuga's roar overlapped with the "Yellow Dragon's." Like that, Ryuuga fused with the guardian deity and turned into a giant arrow of light heading towards the "Evil Spirit" in a brash attack.

The "Evil Spirit," who was in the process of overwhelming the heroines, instantly reacted.

"Oh, hateful 'Yellow Dragon'...I was getting tired of waiting!"

The "Evil Spirit" let out another wave. This time, he fired it from both hands.

However, Ryuuga slipped through it while only leaving a trail of light behind, and pierced through the opponent's chest.

"Grrr...!"

For the first time, the "Evil Spirit's" expression warped. However, at the same time, Kyouka was still suffering.

Please bear with it for a little longer, Kyouka.

Your older sister will definitely save you. Hinomori Ryuuga is the protagonist I can rely on.

Turning into bullets of light, Ryuuga attacked the "Evil Spirit" many times over while swiveling around.

She indiscriminately pierces and penetrates the enemy, all while continuing to increase in speed and momentum.

"Y, you..."

It was obvious that the "Evil Spirit" was falling behind on being able to react. Getting irritated, he started randomly firing waves which didn't hit Ryuuga or the heroines.

One of the waves landed in front of me! The impact gouged a large hole into the ground.

Hey. Watch it. I almost jumped to my feet by reflex from that.

"Why? My power should have been able to handle this much...!"

With his irritation getting increasingly violent, the "Evil Spirit" seemed to be speaking to himself in complaint. I never thought that he would've been such a

sore loser.

“Brother! Now! While I’m holding him back, hurry...hurry and do something about the ‘Evil Spirit!’”

On the ground, Kyouka shouted while having a face drenched with sweat.

(Kyouka...still has her consciousness!)

In other words, the “Evil Spirit” isn’t in his top condition, and it seems that Kyouka, the vessel, is able to resist him and hold back his power, even if just a little bit.

As expected of her being someone from the Hinomori household...it seems that the “Evil Spirit” made a mistake in what vessel to dwell inside.

(However, even in the current situation, I can’t overlook how she addressed Ryuga as “Brother” ...)

That precisely follows the pattern of sub-characters. I definitely want to discuss the doctrine of supporting roles with Kyouka someday.

“D, don’t tell me this young girl...don’t tell me you...ngh?!”

This one chance Kyouka made will determine either victory or defeat.

Noticeably large bullets of light were already heading towards the “Evil Spirit.” They fired off with radiances of gold, then white, blue, and red. All of the main characters had banded together to deal the final blow.

“Vanish, ‘Evil Spirit!’ To the depths of hell!”

Immediately following was a heroic cry from Ryuuga. The light burst open upon impact.

“Gwooooooah!”

The light engulfed the “Evil Spirit” as he made a death cry, then he disappeared.

His large shadow form dispersed, and his echoing roar was overshadowed by an explosion.

—The “Apostles of Hell” are humanity’s enemies that seek “death and destruction” upon this world.

Their king, the “Evil Spirit,” had perished here.

He had completely disappeared, leaving behind Kyouka.

Having barely finished the final battle, Ryuuga and the others approached me.

Yukimiya was entrusted with taking care of Kyouka, who had fainted, and Ryuuga had crouched down in front of me. Then, her face gently came closer.

“It’s over, Ichirou. With this, I can show you my bunny costume.”

Though she’s whispering to my ear, I’m in the middle of a dramatic faint right now. Unlike Kyouka, I’m only pretending to be asleep.

“All things considered, don’t you wonder who on earth...Kobayashi is?”

“Hmm. Nobody other than us is supposed to be able to fight the apostles...”

“That’s the biggest mystery remaining.”

Each of the heroines say their comments.

I don’t think it’s a mystery anymore. I’m the “Black Tortoise.” I continued neglecting this the entire time, yet I was able to still be fine after an open attack from the final boss. I’m the cheat-like “Black Tortoise.” What else could it be?

“Well, to put it simply...it seems Ichirou really isn’t an ordinary person.”

Confirming that I was breathing, Ryuuga smiled while stroking my cheek.

“But, it doesn’t matter who he is. Ichirou is Ichirou. He’s dear to me.”

Once Ryuuga said that, the heroines instantly gave a voice of disapproval.

“Hinomori. You’re being a little affectionate with Ichirou, aren’t you. I don’t really enjoy that.”

“I agree. I don’t enjoy it either. To start with, do you feel nothing when you see us, Ryuuga? Even when our clothes are torn here and there, also exposing some skin?”

“I don’t find it enjoyable either. However, I do like it when boys get lovey-dovey.”

The tension of the battle is already gone, and it seems we’ve reached the conclusion.

...Now then, I have one more task to do here.

(The mood has calmed down at just the right amount. If I'm going to make a move—then the time is now.)

My “plan” is as follows.

Kobayashi Ichirou, who's believed to have been near death, will actually be fine thanks to the defense power of the “Black Tortoise.” I'll suddenly wake up while saying “*yawn* What a nice nap.” Next, I'll feign ignorance by saying “Huh? Where am I? Why was I even sleeping here?”

Having exhausted the ability of the “Black Tortoise” to its limit, I lost that power in exchange for being safe. Furthermore, my memory of the past several weeks will be gone. That is to say, I'll return to being just an ordinary person.

All the flags I raised with the heroines and Ryuuga being a woman toward me will be gone...it's perfect, if I do say so myself.

This is the “no memory tactic.”

With this, the finale will arrive with me being Ryuuga's friend character! As for what comes after that, I'll cross that bridge when I get there!

Allow me to show you Kobayashi Ichirou's once-in-a-lifetime grand play.

Don't rush it. Not yet. Just a little more...okay, now!

“*yawn* What a nice—”

“Everyone! Are you alright?!”

At that moment,

My yawning was drowned out by the sudden voice of a girl.

Everyone instantly looked over in that direction, and in a panic, I continued feigning sleep. What was that? Who was that? All the main characters are already here, right?!

A lively girl with a small build and a short hairstyle came running over. By very slightly opening my eyes to observe, I could see that she was wearing the Oumei High School uniform.

She was flat-chested, had round eyes, and looked younger than Kyouka, who

was a junior high school second year student. However, it seemed that her physical ability was quite high. It didn't seem like she had weak spots anywhere.

(W, who is this...? Was there even a character like this? Why is she appearing now?)

No wait—I have a feeling that I've seen her somewhere before. I have a memory of her in the recess of my mind.

I soon got my answer. Despite Ryuuga and the others letting her join the group as if it was normal, she arbitrarily introduced herself.

However, that self-introduction overturned the core of my “plan,” and my reason for being.

“Kurogame Rina here. I safely sealed all the doors to the spirit world that were opened!”

Kurogame Rina smiled with a salute.



(Kurogame Rina, she said...she sealed the doors, she said...?)

There, I finally remembered her.

Right. This person is Ryuuga's childhood friend. They reunited for the first time in several years, she lives next to Ryuuga, they're acquainted on a family-wide scale, and she's in the second year E Class.

She was the heroine/candidate that I had arbitrarily excluded!

Come to think of it, there was indeed someone like her. However, why is she able to seal the doors? No wonder Ryuuga and the others didn't care about the doors to the spirit world...and I suppose it was because of her?

While I was feeling uneasy, Ryuuga and the others smiled at Kurogame Rina as if they were familiar with her.

"Good job, Rina. But I wish you could have arrived sooner. If you were here, victory would've been secured more easily."

"Ehehe, sorry, Ryu. I've only awakened to this power recently, so I'm not good at wielding it yet."

"Good grief, I'm worried about how you do things at your own pace, Rina."

"Ahaha~."

"You're supposed to be 'The Star-Wall Guardian.' I'm Ryuuga's sword, and you're his shield. You have to polish yourself up."

"I know~."

"It's a bit unfair that you're the only one who's known Hinomori since childhood."

"Say, everyone. It seems you haven't noticed it yet, but Ryu is a g..."

"Aah! Don't mind what she's saying! Don't mind it at all!"

Ryuuga got up and frantically tried to avoid the matter.

Apparently, Kurogame Rina knows about Ryuuga's secret. I suppose that's one of the privileges of being a childhood friend.

(Actually, I don't care about that.)

I'm trembling in fear right now. My pupils have seriously shrunk.

An awakening, was it? “The Star-Wall Guardian,” was it?

Then there’s her last name of Kurogame. Don’t tell me, don’t tell me, she’s...!
(TLN: Kurogame directly translates to “Black Tortoise,” but does not use the same kanji characters as the Black Tortoise god does.)

“Anyways, everyone! Please take care of me from now on! I’m Kurogame Rina, the ‘Black Tortoise.’”

It’s you, isn’t it!

You’re the “Black Tortoise,” aren’t you!

(Why has such an important thing been kept silent! Why wasn’t she involved with the main story at all! Yet, she awakened and took part in the final battle!)

I wanted to get up right away and grab her by the collar. I wanted to ask what on earth the meaning of this strange adventure I went through was.

However, I can’t do that. If I get up now, I’ll be held accountable for being uninjured.

(I’m not the final boss. I’m not an apostle. I’m not the “Black Tortoise.” So what am I...? Haven’t I just been dampening the story so far...?)

Anyways, thanks to Kurogame Rina, I completely lost my chance to get up—now there’s just one mystery remaining.

Who is Kobayashi Ichirou? What lies behind this mystery?

Epilogue

When the final battle ended, I was taken to the hospital.

Kyouka, on the other hand, is resting at her home. I wanted to do that too, but there's no helping it since I didn't wake up.

I received emergency treatment, and even received a thorough checkup. The doctor said "It's just anemia." I could only reply with "I suppose that would be the case."

(Well, I'm glad that I can skip school for the time being...)

While laying in my hospital bed, I continued to be puzzled from daytime.

Ryuuga and the others tried to visit, but since I was going to leave the hospital soon, I declined their visit. Thanks to some luck, I was able to just barely convince them with an explanation of "I don't remember anything during the final battle." However, I'm not sure what to do beyond this point...

In the end, I learned the fact that Ryuga is a woman. Of course, the flag with the heroines are still there. I also got acquainted with a woman apostle who was part of the upper echelons.

And the biggest problem is that I returned to being a mystery character.

All of the foreshadowing has been cast away, and peace for this world has arrived.

There's no point in returning to a friend character anymore. Ryuuga's battles have already finished.

"As for me...I wonder what will happen with Ryuga."

While I was saying that to myself, I received a message from my cellphone.

The sender was Ryuuga. I suppose that just she wants to decide on a day to show off her bunny cosplay. Either that, or she wants to decide on a name for a future child.

'To Ichirou. How's your condition? Don't push yourself too much.'

The message began with such sympathies.

However, the contents that followed were outside of my expectations. Or rather, they were outrageous.

‘Actually, I have one important matter to say. I was worried about whether to tell you now, but...I think it really would have been better if I had told you sooner.’

Once reading the words, my face gradually began to stiffen. My heart rate accelerated.

‘In his final moments, the ‘Evil Spirit’ said something. He said that he was one of the four fiends. Sooner or later, the other three rulers will revive.’

Four fiends? What are the four fiends?

An explanation was immediately written in the following sentence.

‘The four fiends are ‘Evil Spirits’ that have been hostile towards humanity since ancient times. They are the evil gods Hundun, Taotie, Taowu, and Qiongqi...my mission is not over yet. It seems that the apostles are already looking for a way to bring the next ‘Evil Spirit’ to life.’ (*TLN: Some more Chinese mythology*)

It’s not over yet?

Only “part one” of Ryuuga’s story has finished?

‘Sorry, Ichirou. But, I’ll keep trying my best. There’s still much more to do for our lovers training, so—’

I shifted my sight away from the cellphone in the middle of reading the message.

It was because I noticed a dark aura coming from my hand.

“W, what is this? There aren’t any enemies around...”

I shifted myself upright while confused, and then I felt a strong presence in my back.

“!”

...To be honest, I feel like I shouldn’t turn around.

I felt that if I turned around, there would be a more terrifying and freaky being than a ghost coming from behind.

(Don't tell me that my true character is being a second Kyouka...? Or more accurately, a character who'll take a position akin to Kyouka's during "part two"...?)

Mion talked about something before. She said the reason she couldn't attack me was because I "was an existence close to them." Furthermore, this dark aura...is definitely the same as the one Kyouka was emitting.

While I was frozen stiff, the presence from my back grew steadily stronger. It was an ill will, I already knew that long ago.

Eventually, it turned towards me.

"The being" on my back called out to me with an easygoing tone.

"Boss, is it okay to be lying down here? Your finals are coming up soon."

He was unexpectedly fluent at speaking. What is this guy so uneasy about? *(TLN: The previous 'Evil Spirit' spoke in katakana whenever hiragana should've been used, which indicated a certain rough/inarticulate manner to his speech. This one speaks normally.)*

"Thanks to that attack from Hundun, I was able to completely awaken. That damn bastard, serves him right to get done in."

That "damn bastard" was the "Evil Spirit" dwelling within Kyouka, right? Then, this guy is—

"Boss. Please don't ignore me."

"That being" had a bit of a peeved tone. I turned to face it, and gave a reply.

"...Are you also an 'Evil Spirit?'"

"Yep, an 'Evil Spirit.' You can call me Tie."

Tie. He's probably *that*. One of the four fiends, Taotie.

The story of Hinomori Ryuuga still continues. Perhaps that's a good thing.

However, returning to a friend character seems pretty much impossible.